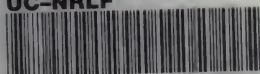


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IN PREPARATION,  
CIMMERIA.

# THE ANATOMY OF NEGATION.

BY

EDGAR SALTUS.

“Quoy qu'on nous presche, il faudroit  
toujours se souvenir que c'est l'homme  
qui donne et l'homme qui reçoit.”

MONTAIGNE.

WILLIAMS AND NORGATE,  
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Il est un jour, une heure, où dans le chemin rude,  
Courbé sous le fardeau des ans multipliés,  
L'Esprit humain s'arrête, et pris de lassitude,  
Se retourne pensif vers les jours oubliés.

La vie a fatigué son attente inféconde ;  
Désabusé du Dieu qui ne doit point venir,  
Il sent renaître en lui la jeunesse du monde ;  
Il écoute ta voix, ô sacré souvenir !

. . . . .  
Mais si rien ne répond dans l'immense étendue  
Que le stérile écho de l'éternel désir,  
Adieu, déserts, où l'âme ouvre une aile éperdue !  
Adieu, songe sublime, impossible à saisir !

Et toi, divine Mort, où tout rentre et s'efface,  
Accueille tes enfants dans ton sein étoilé ;  
Affranchis-nous du temps, du nombre et de l'espace,  
Et rends-nous le repos que la vie a troublé !

LECONTE DE LISLE.



## PREFATORY NOTE.

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THE accompanying pages are intended to convey a tableau of anti-theism from Kapila to Leconte de Lisle. The anti-theistic tendencies of England and America have been treated by other writers; in the present volume, therefore, that branch of the subject is not discussed.

To avoid misconception, it may be added that no attempt has been made to prove anything.

BIARRITZ, *15th September, 1886.*



THE  
ANATOMY OF NEGATION.

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CHAPTER I.

THE REVOLT OF THE ORIENT.

MAN, as described by Quatrefages, is a religious animal. The early naturalists said the same thing of the elephant ; but while this statement, which contains all the elements of a libel, has fallen into disrepute, the former, little by little, has assumed the purple among accepted facts.

Man's belief in the supernatural antedates chronology. It was unfathered and without a mother. It was spontaneous, natural, and unassisted by revelation. It sprang into being with the first flight of fancy.

The characteristic trait of primitive man seems to have been that of intellectual passivity. He was never astonished : if he noticed anything, it was his own weakness ; the power of the elements he accepted as a matter of course. The phenomena that he witnessed, the sufferings that he endured, were to him living enemies whose vio-

lence could be conjured by prayers and donations. Everything had its spectre; phantoms were as common as leaves. There was not a corner of the earth unpeopled by vindictive demons. In sleep he was visited by them all, and as his dreams were mainly nightmares, his dominant sensation was that of fright.

As his mind developed, frontiers were outlined between the imaginary and the real; the animate and the inanimate ceased to be identical. Instead of attributing a particular spirit to every object, advancing theology conceived a number of aggrandised forces. The earth, sea and sky were laid under contribution, and the phenomena of nature were timidly adored. In the course of time these open-air deities were found smitten by a grave defect—they were visible. The fear of the unseen demanded something more mysterious, a hierarchy of invisible divinities of whom much might be suspected and but little known. It was presumably at this point that the high-road to polytheism was discovered; and when man grew to believe that the phenomena which his ancestors had worshipped were but the unconscious agents of higher powers, the gods were born.

Consecutive stages of development such as these have evidently been far from universal. There are races whose belief in the supernatural is so accidental that any classification is impossible. There are others in whose creeds the transition from animism to broader views is still



unmarked. In the equatorial regions of Africa, in Madagascar, Polynesia, and among certain Tartar tribes, animism and its attendant fetishism is reported to be still observable. The distinction between the palpable and the impalpable, the separation between what is known to be material and that which is conceived to be divine, does not necessarily exist even in countries that have reached a high degree of civilisation. In India, the dance of the bayaderes before the gilded statues, and the top-playing that is to amuse a stone Krishna, are cases in point. But these instances are exceptions to the general rule. It seems well established that man, in proportion to his intelligence, passed out of animism, loitered in polytheism, and drifted therefrom into monotheistic or pantheistic beliefs.

The race whose beliefs have held most steadfast from their incipency to the present day is the Hindu. In their long journey these beliefs have encountered many vicissitudes ; they have been curtailed, elaborated and degraded, but in the main they are still intact. At the contact with fresher faiths, the primitive religions of other lands have either disappeared abruptly or gradually faded away. It is India alone that has witnessed an autonomous development of first theories, and it is in India that the first denying voice was raised. To appreciate the denial it is necessary to understand what was affirmed. For this purpose a momentary digression may be permitted.

In the beginning of the Vedic period, Nature in her entirety was held divine. To the delicate imagination of the early Āryan, the gods were in all things, and all things were gods. In no other land have myths been more fluid and transparent. Mountains, rivers and landscapes were regarded with veneration ; the skies, the stars, the sun, the dawn and dusk were adored, but particularly Agni, the personification of creative heat. Through lapse of time of which there is no chronology, this charming naturalism drifted down the currents of thought into the serenest forms of pantheistic beliefs.

The restless and undetermined divinities, omnipresent and yet impalpable, the wayward and changing phenomena, contributed one and all to suggest the idea of a continuous transformation, and with it, by implication, something that is transformed. Gradually the early conception of Agni expanded into a broader thought. From the spectacle of fire arose the theory of a deva, one who shines ; and to this deva a name was given which signified both a suppliant and a supplication—Brahmā. In this metamorphosis all vagueness was lost. Brahmā became not only a substantial reality, but the creator of all that is. Later, the labour of producing and creating was regarded as an imperfection, a blemish on the splendour of the Supreme. It was thought a part of his dignity to be majestically inert, and above him was conceived the existence of a still higher being, a being who was also called Brahmā ;

yet this time the name was no longer masculine, but neuter and indeclinable—neuter as having no part in life, and indeclinable because unique.\*

This conception of a neuter principle, eternal, inactive, and a trifle pale perhaps, was not reached during the period assigned to the Vedas. It was the work of time and of fancy, but it was unassisted. The religion of India is strictly its own; its systems were founded and its problems solved almost before the thinkers of other lands were old enough to reflect. In Greece, which was then in swaddling clothes, Anaxagorus was the first who thought of a pure Intelligence, and this thought he contented himself with stating; its development was left to other minds, and even then it remained unadorned until Athens heard the exultant words of Paul. Nor could the Hindus have gathered their ideas from other countries. Their brothers, the Persians, were watching the combat between Ahura-Mazda and Ahriman. With the Hebrews there was no chance nor rumour of contact: Elohim had not given way to Jehovah. Chaldea was celebrating with delirious rites the nuptials of Nature and the Sun; while far beyond was Egypt, and on her heart the Sphinx.

It seems, then, not unsafe to say that the Vedas and the theories that were their after-growth have no connection with any foreign

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\* Burnouf: *Essai sur le Veda*. Taine: *Essais*.

civilisation. Beyond this particular, Brahmanism enjoys over all other religions the peculiar distinction of being without a founder. Its germ, as has been hinted, was in the Vedas ; but it was a germ merely that the priests planted and tended, and watched develop into a great tree, which they then disfigured with unsightly engraftments.

Emerson recommended us to treat people as though they were real, and added, "Perhaps they are." But the doubt that lingered in the mind of the stately pantheist never entered into that of the Hindu. In its purest manifestation the creed of the latter was a negation of the actuality of the visible world. The forms of matter were held to be illusive, and the semblance of reality possessed by them was considered due to *Māyā*. *Māyā* originally signified Brahmâ's longing for something other than himself ; something that might contrast with his eternal quietude ; something that should occupy the voids of space ; something that should lull the languors of his infinite ennui. From this longing sprang whatever is, and it was through *Māyā*, which afterwards became synonymous with illusion, that a phantom universe surged before the god's delighted eyes, the mirage of his own desire.

This ghostly world is the semblance of reality in which man dwells : mountains, rivers, landscapes, the earth itself, the universe and all humanity, are but the infinite evolutions of his fancy. The ringing lines that occur in Mr.

Swinburne's "Hertha" may not improperly be referred to him :

"I am that which began ;  
Out of me the years roll ;  
Out of me, God and man ;  
I am equal and whole.

God changes, and man, and the form of them bodily.  
I am the soul."

Familiarly, Brahmâ is the spider drawing from his breast the threads of existence ; emblematically, a triangle inscribed in a circle ; poetically, the self-existing supremacy that is enthroned on a lotus of azure and gold ; and theologically, the one really existing essence, the eternal germ from which all things issue and to which all things at last return.

From man to Brahmâ, a series of higher forms of existence are traceable in an ascending scale till three principal divinities are reached. These, the highest manifestations of the First Cause, Brahmâ the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Siva the Destroyer, constitute the Tri-murti, the Trinity, typified in the magically mystic syllable Om. To these were added a host of inferior deities and even local gods similar to those which the Romans recognised in later years. Such was and still is the celestial hierarchy. In the eyes of the Hindu, none of these gods are eternal. At the end of cycles of incommensurable duration, the universe will cease to be, the heavens will be rolled up like a garment, the Tri-murti dissolved ; while in space shall rest but the great



First Cause, through whose instrumentality, after indefinite kalpas, life will be re-beckoned out of chaos and the leash of miseries unloosed.

This delicious commingling of the real and the ideal degenerated with the years. Like Olympus, it was too fair to last. Brahmā, Vishnu and Siva, once regarded as various manifestations of the primal essence, became in lapses of time concrete. Female counterparts were found for them, and the most poetic of the creeds of man was lowered into a sensuous idolatry. To-day there is nothing, however monstrous or grotesque, that is deemed unfit for worship. In Bénarès there is a shrine to small-pox ; in Gaya there is one to the police ; and it may be that somewhere between Cape Comorin and the Himalayas an altar has been raised to those who dull digestion with the after-dinner speech.

This, however, is the work of the priest. In earlier days the higher castes of man, the younger brothers of the gods, were thought capable of understanding the perfection that resides in Brahm. It was held that they might ascend to the rank of their elders, and with them at last be absorbed in the universal spirit. The one pathway to this goal was worship, and over it the priests constituted themselves the lawful guides.

The laws which they codified were numberless, and an infraction of any one of them was severely visited on the transgressor. For each fault, whether of omission or commission, there was an expiation to be undergone, and it was taught

that the unatoned violation of a precept precipitated the offender into one of twenty-eight hells which their inflammable imaginations had created.

In the face of absurdities such as these, it is permissible to suppose that, like the Roman augurs, the educated Brahmins could not look at each other without laughing ; yet, however this may be, it seems certain that many of the laity laughed at them. Already in the Rig-Veda mention was made of those who jeered at Agni. The question as to whether there is really another life seems to have been often raised, and that too in the Brahmanas. Yaska, a venerable sage, found himself obliged to refute the opinions of sages far older and more venerable than himself, who had declared the Vedas to be a tissue of nonsense. This scepticism had found many adherents. The name given to these early disbelievers was *Nastikas*—They who deny. Like other sects, they had aphorisms and slokas of their own, which with quaint derision they attributed to the tutor of the gods. The aphorisms appear to have been markedly anti-theistic, while the slokas were captivating invitations to the pleasures of life.

“Vivons, ouvrons nos cœurs aux ivresses nouvelles :  
Dormir et boire en paix, voilà l'unique bien.  
Buvons ! Notre sang brûle et nos femmes sont belles :  
Demain n'est pas encore, et le passé n'est rien !”

Among those who laughed the loudest was Kapila. His life is shrouded in the dim magnificence of legends. There let it rest ; yet if little

can be said of the man, his work at least is not unfamiliar to students. The Sāṅkhya Kārika, which bears his name, is one of the most important and independent relics of Indian thought. In its broadest sense, Sāṅkhya means rationalism or system of rational philosophy. In India it is known as the philosophy Niriswara, the philosophy without a god.

Kapila was the first serious thinker who looked up into the archaic skies and declared them to be void. In this there was none of the moderation of scepticism, and less of the fluctuations of doubt. Kapila saw that the idea of a Supreme Being was posterior to man; that Nature, anterior to her demiurge, had created him; and he resolutely turned his back on the Tri-murti, and denied that a deity existed, or that the existence of one was necessary to the order and management of the world. The motor-power he held to be a blind, unconscious force, and of this force life was the melancholy development. If he had disbelieved in transmigration, Schopenhauer would not have startled the world with a new theory.

Kapila's purpose was to relieve man from pain. There were no rites to be observed. Knowledge and meditation were alone required. He recognised but three things—the soul, matter and pain. Freedom from pain was obtainable, he taught, by the liberation of the soul from the bondage of matter. According to his teaching, the heavens, the earth and all that in them is,



are made up of twenty-five principles, and of these principles matter is the first and the soul the last. Matter is the primordial element of universal life, the element that animates and sustains all things. The principles that succeed it are simply its developments. Of these, the soul is the chief. It is for matter to act and for the soul to observe. When its observations are perfect and complete, when it has obtained a discriminative knowledge of the forms of matter, of primeval matter and of itself, then is it prepared to enter into eternal beatitude.

On the subject of eternal beatitude, each one of the systems of Eastern thought has had its say. That which Kapila had in view is not entirely clear. He gave no description of it otherwise than in hinting that it was a state of abstract and unconscious impassability, and he appears to have been much more occupied in devising means by which man might be delivered from the evils of life than in mapping charts of a fantastic paradise.

The sentiment of the immedicable misery of life is as prominent in the preface of history as on its latest and uncompleted page. The problem of pain agitated the minds of the earliest thinkers as turbulently as it has those of the latest comers. In attempting to solve it, in endeavouring to find some rule for a law of error, the Hindu accepted an unfathered idea that he is expiating the sins of anterior and unremembered existences, and that he will continue to expiate them until

all past transgressions are absolved and the soul is released from the chain of its migrations. According to the popular theory, the chain of migrations consists in twenty-four lakhs of birth, a lakh being one hundred thousand.

Apparently such beatitude as lay beyond the tomb consisted to Kapila in relief from transmigration, and this relief was obtainable by the ransomed soul, only, as has been hinted, through a knowledge acquired of matter and of itself. Garmented in the flesh of him that constitutes its individuality, the soul was to apply itself to an understanding of Nature, who, with the coquetry of a bayadere, at first resists and then unveils her beauties to the eyes of the persistent wooer. This knowledge once obtained, the soul is free. It may yet linger awhile on earth, as the wheel of the spinner turns for a moment after the impulse which put it in motion has ceased to act; but from that time the soul has fulfilled all the conditions of its deliverance, and is for ever enfranchised from the successive migrations which the unransomed soul must still undergo.

In his attack on official theology, Kapila paid little attention to its rites and observances. He probably fancied that if the groundwork was undermined, the superstructure would soon totter. In this he was partially correct, though the result of his revolt was entirely different from what he had expected. The climax of his philosophy is a metaphysical paradox: "Neither I am, nor is aught mine, nor is there any I"—a climax which

must have delighted Hegel, but one which it is difficult to reconcile with the report of the philosophy's present popularity. And that it is popular there seems to be no doubt. There is even a common saying in India that no knowledge is equal to the Sāṅkhya, and no power equal to the Yoga, which latter, a combination of mnemonics and gymnastics, is a contrivance for concentrating the mind intently on nothing.

But whatever popularity the Sāṅkhya may now enjoy, it is evident that, like other systems of Eastern thought, it was understood only by adepts; and even had the science which it taught been offered to the people, it was not of a nature to appeal to them. The masses to-day are as ignorant as carps, and at that time they were not a whit more intelligent. Besides, it was easier to understand the Tri-murti than twenty-five abstract principles. Brahmā was very neighbourly, and his attendant gods were known to tread the aisles of night. The languid noons and sudden dawns were sacred with their presence. What could be more reasonable? If life was an affliction, that very affliction carried the sufferer into realms of enchantment, where Brahmâ was enthroned on a lotus of azure and gold.

It is small wonder then that Kapila's lessons left the established religion practically unharmed. Kant's "Kritik" did not prevent the Königsbergians from listening to the *Pfarrer* with the same faith with which their fathers had listened before them. And Kant, it may be remembered, was not

only a popular teacher, he was one that was revered. But aside from any influence that Kapila's philosophy may have exerted, it was evidently smitten by a grave defect. Concerning the soul's ultimate abiding-place it was silent. This silence enveloped the entire system in an obscurity which another and a greater thinker undertook to dissipate.

It has been said before, and with such wisdom that the saying will bear repetition, that revolutions are created, not by the strength of an idea, but by the intensity of a sentiment. In great crises there is a formula that all await ; so soon as it is pronounced, it is accepted and repeated ; it is the answer to an universal demand. Toward the close of the sixth century before the present era, at Kapilavastu, a city and kingdom situated at the foot of the mountains of Nepal, a prince of the blood, after prolonged meditations on the misfortunes of life, pronounced a watchword of this description.

The name of this early Muhammad was Siddārtha. He was the heir of the royal house of Sakya, and in later years, in remembrance of his origin, he was called Sakya-Muni, Sakya the Anchorite, to which was added the title of Buddha, the Sage. The accounts of his life are contained in the Lalita Vistāra, a collection of fabulous episodes in which the supernatural joins hands with the matter-of-fact. It is said, for instance, that he was born of an immaculate conception, and died of an indigestion of pork. Apart from

the mythical element, his life does not appear to have been different from that of other religious reformers, save only that he is supposed to have been born in a palace instead of a hovel. To his twenty-ninth year Siddārtha is represented as living at court, surrounded by all the barbaric ease and gorgeousness of the Ind. Yet even in his youth his mind appears to have been haunted by great thoughts. He took no part in the sports of his companions, and was accustomed, it is said, to wander away into the solitudes of the vast forests of bamboo, and there to linger, lost in meditation.

In the course of time he was married to a beautiful girl, but even in her fair arms his thoughts were occupied with the destinies of the world. During the succeeding festivals and revels, amid the luxury of the palace and the enticements of love, he meditated on the miseries of life. In Brahmanism he found no consolation. At its grotesqueness he too smiled, but his smile was nearer to tears than to laughter. The melancholy residue of his reflections was with him even in dream, and one night—so runs the legend—he was encouraged in a vision to teach mankind a law which should save the world and establish the foundation of an eternal and universal rest.

A combination of fortuitous circumstances, the play of the merest hazard, appear to have strengthened the effect of this vision. On the high-roads about Kapilavastu he encountered a



man bent double with age, another stricken by fever, and lastly a corpse. "A curse," he cried, "on youth that age must overcome ; a curse on health that illness destroys ; a curse on life which death interrupts ! Age, illness, death, could they but be for ever enchained !" Soon after, he disappeared, and seeking the jungles, which at that time were peopled with thinkers of ken, he devoted himself to the elaboration of his thoughts. It was there that he seems to have acquired some acquaintance with the philosophy of Kapila. He divined its significance and saw its insufficiency. Thereafter for six years he gave himself up to austerities so severe that, in the naïve language of the legend, they startled even the gods. These six years are said to have been passed at Ouruvilva, a place as famous in Buddhist annals as Kapilavastu. In this retreat he arranged the principles of his system, and perfected the laws and ethics which were to be its accompaniment. Yet still the immutable truth that was to save the world escaped him. A little longer he waited and struggled. The Spirit of Sin, with all his seductive cohorts, appeared before him. The cohorts were routed and the Spirit overcome ; the struggle was ended ; and under a Bodhi-tree which is still shown to the pilgrim, Siddārtha caught the immutable truth, and thereupon presented himself as a saviour to his fellows.

Such is the popular legend. Its main incidents have been recently and most felicitously conveyed in *The Light of Asia*. As a literary contribution,

Mr. Arnold's poem is simply charming ; as a page of history, it has the value of a zero from which the formative circle has been eliminated. The kingdom of Kapilavastu, or rather Kapilavasthu, was an insignificant hamlet. The Buddha's father was a petty chieftain, the rājā of a handful of ignorant savages. Palaces he had none ; his wealth was his strength ; and could his concubine be recalled to life, she would, had she any sense of humour, which is doubtful, be vastly amused at finding that she had been given a rôle in the solar myth.

There can, however, be no doubt that the Buddha really lived. His existence is as well established as that of the Christ. To precisely what an extent he was a visionary is necessarily difficult of conjecture. Yet unless all belief in him be refused, it seems almost obligatory to assume that after years of reflection he considered himself in possession of absolute knowledge. The truth which he then began to preach was not a doctrine that he held as personal and peculiar to himself, but rather an eternal and changeless law which had been proclaimed from age to age by other Buddhas, of whom he fancied himself the successor.

To speak comparatively, it is only with recent years that the attention of Western students has been attracted to Buddhist literature. To-day, however, thanks to translations from the Pali and kindred tongues, it is possible for any one to study the doctrine from the sacred books themselves.

There are verses in the Vedas which when recited are said to charm the birds and beasts. Compared with them, the Buddhist Gospels are often lacking in beauty. To be the better understood, the priests, who addressed themselves not to initiates but to the masses, employed a language that was simple and familiar. There are in consequence many repetitions and trivial digressions, but there are also parables of such exquisite colour, that in them one may feel the influence of a bluer sky than ours, the odour of groves of sandal, the green abysses of the Himalayas, and the gem-like splendour of white Thibetian stars.

The Buddha believed neither in a personal nor an impersonal God. The world he compared to a wheel turning ceaselessly on itself. Of Brahman tenets he preserved but one, that of the inmedicable misery of life. But the doctrine which he taught may perhaps best be summarised as resting on three great principles—Karma, Arahatsip and Nirvāna. When these principles are understood, the mysteries of the creed are dissolved, and the need of esoteric teaching diminished.

It may be noted, by way of proem, that the theory of the transmigration of souls is not advanced in the Vedas. It is a part of Brahman teaching, but Brahmanism and Vedaism are not the same. The Vedas are claimed as the outcome of direct revelation, while all that part of post-Vedic literature in which Brahmanism is enveloped is held to be purely traditional. The



origin of the theory of the transmigration is indiscoverable, but it is one which has been shared by many apparently unrelated races. It was a part of the creed of the Druids ; the Australian savage, as well as some of the American aborigines, held to the same idea ; thinkers in Egypt and in Greece advanced identical tenets ; it is alluded to in the Talmud, and hinted at in the Gospel which bears the name of St. John. Possibly it was held by the pre-Aryan inhabitants of India, and in that case it is equally possible that it was through them that the doctrine descended into Brahmanism. But whether or not its engraftment came about in this way is relatively a matter of small moment. The important point to be observed is that it was not received by the Buddhists. The popular idea to the contrary is erroneous.

Spinoza noted that there is in every man a feeling that he has been what he is from all eternity, and this feeling has not left the Buddhist unaffected. But between such a sentiment and a belief in transmigration the margin is wide. The popular error in which the two are confused has presumably arisen from a misunderstanding of the laws of Karma and Vipāka, the laws of cause and effect. The difference therein discoverable amounts in brief to this : in the theory of transmigration the soul is held to be eternal ; in Buddhism the existence of the soul is denied. In the one, the ego resurrects through cycles of unremembered lives ; in the other, nothing sur-

vives save the fruit of its actions. In the one, every man is his own heir and his own ancestor; in the other, the deeds of the ancestor are concentrated in a new individual. In each there is a chain of existences, but in the one they are material, in the other they are moral. One maintains the migration of an essence, the other the results of causality; one has no evidence to support it, the other accords with the law of the indestructibility of force. One is metempsychosis, the other palingenesis; one is beautiful, and the other awkward; but one is merely a theory, and the other is almost a fact.

From this chain the Hindu knew no mode of relief. Prior to the Buddha's advent, there was an unquestioned belief that man and all that encompasses him rolled through an eternal circle of transformation; that he passed through all the forms of life, from the most elementary to the most perfect; that the place which he occupied depended on his merits or demerits; that the virtuous revived in a divine sphere, while the wicked descended to a yet darker purgatory; that the recompense of the blessed and the punishment of the damned were of a duration which was limited; that time effaced the merit of virtue as well as the demerit of sin; and that the law of transmigration brought back again to earth both the just and the unjust, and threw them anew into a fresh cycle of terrestrial existences, from which they could fight free as best they might.

When the Buddha began to teach, he endea-

voured to bring his new theories into harmony with old doctrines. Throughout life, man, he taught, is enmeshed in a web whose woof was woven in preceding ages. The misfortunes that he endures are not the consequences of his immediate actions; they are drafts which have been drawn upon him in earlier days—drafts which he still must honour, and against which he can plead no statute of limitations. Karma pursues him in this life, and unless he learns its relentless code by heart, the fruit of his years is caught up by revolving chains, and tossed back into the life of another. How this occurred, or why it occurred, is explainable only by a cumbersome process from which the reader may well be spared; and it may for the moment suffice to note that while the Buddha agreed with the Brahmans that life formed a chain of existences; it was the former who brought the hope that the chain might be severed.

The means to the accomplishment of this end consist in a victory over the lusts of the flesh, the desire for life and the veils of illusion. When these have been vanquished, the Arahāt, the victor, attains Nirvāṇa.

Nirvāṇa, or Nibbāna as it stands in the Pali, is not a paradise, nor yet a state of post-mortem trance. It is the extinction of all desire, the triple victory of the Arahāt, which precedes the great goal, eternal death. The fruit of earlier sins remain, but they are impermanent and soon pass away. Nothing is left from which another

sentient being can be called into existence. The Arahāt no longer lives; he has reached Para Nirvāṇa, the complete absence of anything, that can be likened only to the flame of a lamp which a gust of wind has extinguished.

The Buddha wrote nothing. It was his disciples who, in councils that occurred after his death, collected and arranged the lessons of their master. In these synods the canon of sacred scripture was determined. It consisted of three divisions, called the Tri-pitaka, or Three Baskets, and contained the Suttas, the discourses of the Buddha—the Dharmas, the duties enjoined on the masses—and lastly the Vinayas, the rules of discipline.

The Dharmas contain the four truths whose discovery is credited to the Buddha. The first is that suffering is the concomitant of life. The second, that suffering is the resultant of desire. The third, that relief from suffering is obtained in the suppression of desire. And fourth, that Nirvāṇa, which succeeds the suppression of desire, is attainable only through certain paths. These paths are eight in number; four of which—correctness in deed, word, thought and sight—were recommended to all men; the remainder—the paths of application, memory, meditation and proper life—are reserved for the eremites.

For the use of the faithful, the four truths have been condensed in a phrase: "Abstain from sin, practise virtue, dominate the flesh—such is the law of the Buddha." The recognition of the four

truths and the observance of the eight virtues are obligatory to all who wish to reach Nirvāna. The neophyte renounces the world and lives a mendicant. Yet inasmuch as a society of saints is difficult to perpetuate, members are admitted from whom the usual vows of continence and poverty are not exacted.

The charm of primitive Buddhism was in its simplicity. The faithful assembled for meditation and not for parade. The practice of morality needed no forms and fewer ceremonies. But with time it was thought well to make some concession to popular superstitions; and although the Buddha had no idea of representing himself as a divinity, every moral and physical perfection was attributed to him. The rest was easy. Idolatry had begun. To the right and left of a saint elevated to the rank of God Supreme, a glowing Pantheon was formed of the Buddhas that had preceded him. A meaningless worship was established; virtues were subordinated to ceremonies; and to-day before a gilded statue a wheel of prayers is turned, while through the dim temples, domed like a vase, the initiates murmur, "Life is evil."

In attempting to convert the multitude, the Buddha made no use of vulgar seductions. From him came no flattery to the passions. The recompense that he promised was not of the earth nor material in its nature. To his believers he offered neither wealth nor power. The psychic force, the seemingly supernatural faculties, that



knowledge and virtue brought to those who had reached superior degrees of sanctity, were shared by the Brahmans as well ; they were an appanage, not a bait. The one reward of untiring efforts was an eternal ransom from the successive horrors of Karma. The paradise which he disclosed was the death of Death. In it all things ceased to be. It was the ultimate annihilation from which life was never to be re-beckoned.

It is not surprising that the captivating quiet of a goal such as this should forcibly appeal to the inclinations of the ascetic ; the wonder of it is that it could be regarded for a moment as attractive to the coarse appetites of the crowd. Nor does it seem that the Christ of Chaos made this mistake. It was the after-comers who undertook to lift the commonplace out of the humdrum. The Buddha's hope of the salvation of all mankind was a dream extending into the indefinite future ; the theory of immediate emancipation was never shared by him. For the plain man, he laid down a law which was a law of grace for all, that of universal brotherhood. If its practice was insufficient to lead him to Nirvana, it was still a preparation thereto, a paving of the way for the travellers that were yet to come.

The method which he employed to convert his hearers seems to have been a tender persuasion, in which there was no trace of the dogmatic. He did not contend against strength, he appealed to weakness, varying the insinuations of his parables according to the nature of the listener, and

charming even the recalcitrant by the simplicity and flavour of his words. In these lessons there were no warnings, no detached maledictions; but there were exhortations to virtue, and pictures of the sweet and sudden silence of eternal rest. His struggle was never with creeds, but with man, with the flesh and its appetites; and from the memory of his victorious combat with himself there came to him precepts and maxims of incomparable delicacy and beauty. These were his weapons. His teaching was a lesson of infinite tenderness and compassion; it was a lesson of patience and resignation and abnegation of self, and especially of humility, which in its renouncement of temporal splendours opens the path to the magnificence of death.

In the ears of not a few modern thinkers, this promise of annihilation has sounded like a gigantic paradox. It has seemed inconceivable that men could be found who would strive unremittingly their whole lives through to reach a goal where nothing was. And yet there were many such, and, what is more to the point, their number is constantly increasing. On the other hand, it has been argued that to those who knew no prospect of supernal happiness and who had never heard of an eternity of bliss, the horror of life might be of such intensity that they would be glad of any release whatever. But the value of this argument is slight. The spectacle of a Buddhist converted to Christianity is the most infrequent that has ever gladdened the heart of

a missionary. Per contra, the number of those who turn from other creeds to that of Buddhism is notoriously large. The number of its converts, however, is not a proof of its perfection. And Buddhism is far from perfect: its fantastic shackles may be alluring to the mystic, but they are meaningless to the mathematician. It may be charming to hold a faith which has put pessimism into verse, and raised that verse into something more than literature; but it is useless. The pleasure of utter extinction is one which we will probably all enjoy, and that too without first becoming Arahats; and yet, again, we may not. The veil of *Māyā* is still unraised. The most we can do to lift it is to finger feebly at the edges. Sakya-Muni taught many an admirable lesson, but in his flights of fancy, like many another since, he transcended the limits of experience. Let those who love him follow.

Charity is the New Testament told in a word. When it was preached on the Mount of Olives it must have brought with it the freshness and aroma of a first conception. Before that time, the Galileans had heard but of Justice and Jehovah; then at once they knew of Christ and Compassion; and ever since the name and the virtue have gone hand-in-hand. And yet five hundred years before, a sermon on charity was preached in Nepal.

The charity which Sakya-Muni taught was not the ordinary liberality which varies from a furtive coin to a public bequest. It was a boundless



sympathy, a prodigality of abandonment in which each creature, however humble, could find a share, and which, once entered in the heart of man, extinguished every spark of egotism. This sentiment of universal compassion was one which the two greatest of the world's reformers sought alike to instil. Between the Prince of Kapilavastu and Jesus of Nazareth there are many resemblances, but none, it may be taken, more striking than this. Beyond the common legend of their birth, both were supposed to have been tempted by the devil; and by the Buddha, as the Christ, the devil was vanquished. Their lessons in ethics were nearly the same; both were nihilists; both held that the highest duty is to be at variance with self; both struck a blow at the virility of man, and neither of them wrote. About the lives of each the myth-makers have been at work; both were deified; and if to-day the believers in the Buddha largely outnumber those of the Christ, it is only fair to note that the former have enjoyed advantages which the latter have never possessed. Through none of their wide leisures have they ever held it a blasphemy to think.

Another religion without a God, and one which is a twin-sister to Buddhism, is that of the Gainas. Explanatory documents concerning it are infrequent, and in search of information the student is usually obliged to turn to Brahman sources. The Gainas are the believers in Gina, the Victorious, as the Buddhists are believers in Buddha,

the Sage. A Gina—in Buddhism this term is one of the many synonyms of Sakya-Muni—is a prophet who, having attained omniscience, comes to re-establish the law of salvation when it has become corrupted through the march of time. There are said to have been twenty-four Ginas, including the most recent; and as the Gainas maintain that the Buddha was a disciple of the founder of their creed, the number corresponds to that of Siddārtha and his twenty-three predecessors. The Gainas, like the Buddhists, deny the authority of the Vedas; they consider them apocryphal, and oppose in their stead a collection of Angas of their own. No sect has been more rigorous than they in the respect of everything that lives. They eat no flesh; and it is reported that the stricter devotees filter their water, breathe through a veil, and as they walk sweep the ground before them, that no insect, however insignificant, may be destroyed. Among the customs in which they differ from Buddhism, suicide is the one worth noting. For a long period this rite seems to have been decorously observed. On most other points the two beliefs are in apparent agreement. The Gainas, too, are atheists. They admit of no Creator, and deny the existence of a perfect and eternal Being. The Gina, like the Buddha, has become perfect, but it is not thought that he has always been so. This negation has not prevented a particular division of the faith from affecting a kind of heretical and schismatic deism. Like the Nepalese,

who have imagined an Adibuddha, a supreme Buddha, they also have invented a Ginapati, a perfect Gina, whom, in opposition to their canonical Angas, they regard as primordial creator. The Angas teach that man possesses a soul, and that this soul, although a pure and an immortal intelligence, is yet the prey of illusion, and for that reason condemned to bear the yoke of matter through an indefinite series of existences. In Gainism it is not existence that is an affliction, it is life; and the Nirvāna is less an annihilation than an entrance into eternal beatitude. To distinguish between the two faiths, the Brahmans called the Buddhists, "They who affirm," and the Gainas, "They who say, Perhaps."\*

The Chinese, who are our elders in little else than corruption, feel as much need for a religion as a civilian does for a military uniform. From the threshold of history to the present day, the inhabitants of the Celestial Empire have had no term wherewith to designate a deity. The name of God has not entered into their philosophy. As a rule, then, when an educated Chinese is asked what his creed is, he answers, that not being a priest, he has none at all. The clergy have three: the official religion—originated by Confucius—Buddhism and Tauism. The latter faith was founded by Laou-tze.

The life of this early thinker has been as liberally interwoven with legends as that of the

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\* Dictionnaire des sciences religieuses, art. Jainisme.

Buddha. The Orient seems to have had a mania for attributing the birth of reformers to immaculate conceptions; and one learns with the weariness that comes of a thrice-told tale, that the mother of Laou-tze, finding herself one day alone, conceived suddenly through the vivifying influence of Nature. But though the conception was abrupt, the gestation was prolonged, lasting, it is said, eighty-four years; and when at last the miraculous child was born, his hair was white—whence his name, Laou-tze, the Aged Baby. This occurred six hundred years before the present era.

The philosophy of this prodigy, contained in the Taou-těh-king, the Book of Supreme Knowledge and Virtue, is regarded by Orientalists as the most profound and authentic relic of early Chinese literature. The most profound, as rivaling the works of Confucius and Mencius; and the most authentic, in that it was the only one said to have been exempt from the different edicts commanding the destruction of manuscripts.

Laou-tze was probably the first thinker who established the fact that it is not in the power of man to conceive an adequate idea of a First Cause, and the first to show that any efforts in that direction result merely in demonstrating human incompetence and the utter vainness of the endeavour. When, therefore, he was obliged to mention the primordial essence in such a manner as to be understood by his hearers, the

figurative term which he employed was Tau. "Tau," he said, "is empty, in operation exhaustless. It is the formless mother of all things." And to this description Spinoza found little to add.

Laou-tze appears to have dipped into all the philosophies then in vogue, and after taking a little eclectic sip from each, elaborated a system so cleverly that he may safely be regarded as the earliest moralist. His doctrine was thoroughly pantheistic. Man, he taught, is a passing and inferior phase of the Great Unity which is the beginning and end of all things, and into which the soul is absorbed. Happiness, he added, is like paradise, an imaginary Utopia, a fiction of the non-existent extending beyond the borderlands of the known. And on the chart which he drew of life, he set up a monitory finger-post, warning men that the only real delights were those that consist in the absence of pain. Enterprise, effort and ambition, were so many good, old-fashioned words which to this early pessimist represented merely a forethought for a future generation. And of a future generation he saw little need. The one laudable aim was in the avoidance of suffering. After all, what was there in life? Nothing save a past as painful as the present, with hope to breed chimeras and the future for a dream.

Like Buddhism, the doctrine of Laou-tze degenerated with the years. Their common simplicity was too subtle for the canaille, and to

each gaudy superstitions have been added. Yet in their primal significance they are as ushers of negation, the initial revolt at the supernatural, the first reasoned attempts to rout the spectres from the mind of man.

In earlier Hinduism, life was a nightmare, and the universe a phantasm that vaunted itself real. In an effort to escape, Kapila lost himself in abstractions, the Buddha ordered Death to stand a lackey at the door of Peace, while Laou-tze turned his almond eyes within and descended the stair of Thought. To the first, salvation lay in metaphysics ; to the second, in virtue ; to the third, in indifference. Had their theories been fused, the revolt might not have been so vain.



## CHAPTER II.

### THE NEGATIONS OF ANTIQUITY.

THE clamour of life and thought entered Greece through Asia Minor. Quinet has called the itinerary of the tribes that took possession of her hills and vales, an itinerary of the gods. That somnambulist of history has seen, as in a vision, their passage marked, here by a temple, there by a shrine. While the tribes dispersed, the gods advanced. Orpheus has told the story of their youth ; but now Orpheus is undiscoverable, and the days of which he sang are as vague as the future. When the gods entered folk-lore, they had already ascended Olympus, and the divinity of Jupiter was attested in traditions out of which Homer formed another Pentateuch. The name of the Ionian Moses is as unsubstantial as that of Orpheus ; but if his personality is uncertain, it is yet a matter of common knowledge that his epics formed the articles of an indulgent creed, and that from them the infant Greece first learned the pleasures that belong to dream. At this time the mysteries of the archaic skies were dissolved. Dread had vanished ; in its place was the Ideal.

Throughout the mellow morns and languid dusks there was an unbroken procession of the gayest, the most alluring divinities ; their fare was ambrosia, their laughter was inextinguishable. Virtue was rewarded on earth, and Nemesis pursued the wrong-doer. The dower of men and maidens was beauty ; love was too near to nature to know of shame ; religion was more æsthetic than moral, more gracious than austere. The theologians were poets : first Orpheus, Musæus and Linus, then Homer and Hesiod ; mirth, magnificence and melancholy they gave in fee.

Homer was not only a poet, he was an historian as well ; and it is a fact amply demonstrated that he believed as little in the sacerdotal legends as Tennyson in the phantom idyls of Arthur. At that time no semblance of revealed religion was affected : the people, however, like all others before and since, would have gods, and gods they got ; yet in displaying them to the infant race, Homer laughed at the divinities, and predicted that their reign would some day cease.

This prescience of the incredulity that was to come is significant. The history of Greece is one of freedom in art, in action, but particularly in thought. The death of Socrates, the flight of Aristotle, are among the exceptions that make the rule. In its broad outlines, the attitude of Hellenic thought was one of aggressive scepticism. This attitude may have been due to the fact that there was nothing which in any way resembled a national faith ; each town, each



hamlet, each upland and valley, possessed myths of its own, and such uniformity as existed appears to have been ritualistic rather than doctrinal. But perhaps the primal cause is best attributable to that nimble spirit of investigation which was at once a characteristic of the Greek intellect and a contrast to the cataleptic reveries of the Hindu.

It goes without the need of telling that the philosophers put Jupiter aside much as one does an illusion of childhood, and possibly with something of the same regret. But this leniency on their part was not universally imitated. The story of Prometheus, the most ancient of fables, traces of which have been discovered in the Vedas, became in the hands of Æschylus a semi-historical, semi-cosmological legend, in which the Titan, as representative of humanity, mouths from the escarpolated summits of Caucasus his hatred and defiance of Jove. Euripides, too, was well in the movement. There was not an article of Hellenic faith that he did not scoff at. Then came the farce. Aristophanes found nothing too sacred for his wit; with the impartiality of genius he joked at gods and men alike.

While the poets and dramatists were pulling down, the philosophers were building up. If the belief in an eternal fancy ball on Olympus was untenable, something, they felt, should be suggested in its place. In lieu, therefore, of the theory that Jupiter was the first link in the chain of the universe, Thales announced that the beginning of things was water; Anaximenes said

air ; Heraclitus preferred fire. Anaximander held to an abstraction, the Infinite. Pythagoras, who, like all his countrymen, dearly loved a quibble, declared that the First Cause was One. This One, Xenophanes asserted, was a self-existent Mind. Empedocles gave as definition a sphere whose centre was everywhere and circumference nowhere, a definition which Pascal revived as an attribute of the Deity. Anaxagoras, who was banished for his pains, believed in a pure Intelligence. This pure Intelligence was not a deity, except perhaps in the sense of a *deus ex machinâ*; it was an explanation, not a god. But even so, it looked like one ; there were already too many unknown gods, and the idea was not received with enthusiasm. Among those who opposed it with particular vehemence was Diagoras, he who first among the Greeks received the name of atheist. This reasoner chanced one day to be at sea during a heavy storm. The sailors attributed the storm to him. All that they were enduring was a punishment for conveying such an impious wretch as he. "Look at those other ships over there," said Diagoras. "They are in the same storm, aren't they? Do you suppose that I am in each of them?"

Diagoras had learned his lessons from Democritus, a thinker who in certain schools of thought holds to-day a position which, if not superior, is at least equal to that of Plato. The reason of this admiration is not far to seek. Democritus is the grandsire of materialism. Materialism is

out of fashion to-day, but to-morrow it may come in again. During a long and continually rejuvenated career, it has been a veritable hydra. Every time its head seemed severed for all eternity, there has sprouted a new one, and one more sagacious than the last.

The theory of atoms announced in the remote past and repeated in recent years underwent a baptism of fire at the beginning of the present century. Dalton applied it to the interpretation of chemical laws, and a little later a band of German erudites embellished it with the garlands of new discoveries. Contemporary science treats it with scant respect ; but all who are of a liberal mind admit that its conclusions have been useful implements of progress. Its originator, Democritus, was a contemporary of Sakya-Muni. It is even possible that he sat at the Buddha's feet ; he is said to have wandered far into the East ; and it is also recorded that he visited Egypt, whither he had been preceded by Pythagoras, and where his questioning eyes must have met the returning stare of the Sphinx.

At that time travelling was not necessarily expensive, yet in his journeys Democritus squandered his substance with great correctness ; and when after years of absence he returned to his home, he found himself amenable to a law of the land which deprived of the honours of burial those who had dissipated their patrimony. A statute of this description was not of a nature to alarm such a man as Democritus. He invited

all who cared to do so, to meet him in the public square, and there, through the wide leïsure of Thracian days, he recited passages from Diakosmos, his principal work. This procedure, together with the novelty of the ideas which he announced, so impressed his hearers, that they made for him a purse of five hundred talents, and after his death erected statues in his honour. Those indeed were the good old days.

In the system which Democritus suggested to his countrymen, matter was pictured as the union of an infinite number of indivisible elements, which in the diversity of their forms represent the phenomena of nature. Beyond these indivisible elements, space held but voids. Atoms and emptiness is the theory in a phrase. The voids are the absence of obstacles, and the atoms continually passing through them are the constituents of all that is. In their eternal voyage through space, these atoms meet, unite and separate, unrulèd save by the laws of unconscious and mechanical necessity. To their chance clash is due the world; the universe is one of their fortuitous combinations, and the hazard which presided at its formation will some day see it again dissolved. The word hazard, it may be noted, is used from lack of a better term. In exact speech there seems to be nothing which at all resembles it. The accident that occurs in the street, the rambles of the ball on the roulette-table, may seem the play of chance; but were the predisposing causes understood, the accident

would be recognised as the result of a cause in which chance had no part, and in the rambles of the ball the operations of consistent laws would be discerned. Dubois Reymond has noted that if, during a short though determined space of time, an intelligent man were able to mark the exact position and movement of every molecule, he could, in accordance with the laws of mechanics, foresee the whole future of the world. In the same manner that an astronomer can foretell the date on which a comet, after years of remote wanderings, will re-visit our heavens, so in his equations could this imaginary individual read the precise day when England shall burn her last bit of coal, and Germany brew her last keg of beer.

Beyond this theory, which as a matter of course includes the denial that man is a free agent, Democritus was accustomed to assert that out of nothing, nothing comes—an axiom which one does not need to be a mathematician to agree with, though it is one that somewhat impairs the scientific value of the first chapter of Genesis. And were it otherwise, if things sprang from nothing, the producing cause would be limitless ; men might issue from the sea, and fish from the earth. In the fecundity of chaos, everything, even to the impossible, would be possible. But in a system such as this, in which the operations of nature are represented as effected by invisible corpuscles which possess in themselves the laws of all their possible combinations, there is room



only for the actual ; the universe explains itself more or less clearly, and that too without recourse to a First Cause or an over-watching Providence.\*

Democritus was one of the first quietists, but he was quietist without leanings to mysticism. He was among the earliest to note that it is the unexpected that occurs ; and he barricaded himself as best he might against avoidable misfortune by shunning everything that was apt to be a source of suffering or annoyance. Beyond mental tranquillity, he appears to have praised nothing except knowledge ; and it is stated that he hunted truth not so much for the pleasure of the chase as for the delight which the quarry afforded.

The negations of Democritus had been well ventilated when the stage of history was abruptly occupied by a band of charlatan nihilists, who personified the spirit of doubt with ingenious effrontery. These were the sophists. To be called a sophist was originally a compliment. It meant one who was a master in wisdom and eloquence. But when Greece found herself imposed upon by a company of mental gymnasts, who in any argument maintained the pros and cons with equal ease, who made the worst appear the best, who denied all things even to evidence, and affirmed everything even to the absurd, and who took sides with the just and the unjust with

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\* Nolen : *La philosophie de Lange*. Wurtz : *La théorie atomique*.

equal indifference—then the title lost its lustre and degenerated into a slur. This possibly was a mistake. A disapproval of the paradoxes of these dialecticians is almost a praise of the commonplace. Yet the sophists deserve small approbation. Their efforts to show that all is true and all is false, and, above all, the brilliancy of their depravity, undermined thought and morals to such an extent that philosophy, which had taken wings, might have flown for ever away, had it not been re-beckoned to earth by the familiar reform instituted by Socrates.

Socrates was as ungainly as a satyr, but the suppleness of his tongue was that of a witch. At the hands of this insidious Attic, the sophists fared badly. He brought their versatilities into discredit; and in reviewing and enlarging a forgotten theory of Anaxagoras, purified thought with new lessons in virtue. This reaction seems to have been of advantage to moral philosophy, but detrimental to metaphysics; so much so, in fact, that his hearers turned their backs on theory, and devoted themselves to ethics. "Give me wisdom or a rope," cried Antisthenes, presumably to appreciative ears; and when Diogenes lit his dark lantern in broad daylight, he found every one eager to aid him in the ostentatious bizarrerie of that immortal farce.

In the midst of these pre-occupations there appeared a thinker named Pyrrho, to whom every sceptic is more or less indebted. Pyrrho was born at Elis. His people were poor, and

doubtless worthy ; but their poverty compelled him to seek a livelihood, which for a time he seems to have found, with the brush. By nature he was sensitive, nervous, as are all artists, and passionately in love with solitude. From some reason or another, but most probably from lack of success, he gave up painting, and wandered from one school to another, until at last a sudden introduction to Democritus turned the whole current of his restless thought. For this introduction he was indebted to Anaxarchus, a philosopher who went about asserting that all is relative, and confessing that he did not even know that he knew nothing. But in this there was possibly some little professional exaggeration. He was a thorough atomist, and very dogmatic on the subject of happiness, which, with broad good sense, he insisted was found only in the peace and tranquillity of the mind.

In Alexander's triumphant suite, Pyrrho went with this scholar to Asia, and together they visited the magi and the reflective gymnosophists. The abstracted impassability of these visionaries caused him, it is said, an admiration so intense that he made from it a rule of daily conduct ; and one day when his master, with whom he was walking, fell into a treacherous bog, Pyrrho continued calmly on his way, leaving Anaxarchus to the mud and his own devices. It may be that in this there was some prescience of the modern aphorism that any one is strong enough to bear the misfortunes of another ; but even so, Pyrrho,



when it was necessary, could be brave in his own behalf, and one of the few anecdotes that are current represent his uncomplaining endurance of an agonising operation. This occurred before any one was aware of the imperceptibility of pain: the stoics were yet unborn.

During his long journey, Pyrrho acquired all, or nearly all, that the East had to teach. He listened to Brahman and Buddhist, and took from each what best they had to give. The impassability of the one appealed to him forcibly, the ethics of the other seemed to him most admirable; and with these for luggage, packed together with an original idea of his own, he returned to his early home, where his fellow-citizens, as a mark of their appreciation, elevated him to the rank of high-priest, a dignity which may have caused him some slight, if silent, amusement.

At that time Greece was rent by wars and revolutions. In the uncertainty of the morrow and the instability of all things, there was a general effort to enjoy life while enjoyment was yet to be had, and to make that enjoyment as thorough as possible. When, therefore, Pyrrho announced his intention to teach the science of happiness, he found his audience ready-made.

The doctrine which he then unfolded was received at first with surprise, but afterwards with sympathetic attention; it gained for him wide praise, and also fervent followers. These followers, to whom the thanks of posterity are due, took to themselves the duty of preserving

his teaching ; for, like Socrates, Pyrrho wrote nothing.

It has been hinted that Pyrrho accepted the materialism of Democritus, admired the hedonism of Anaxarchus, and practised the impassability of the Hindus. These elements, which formed what may be termed the angles of his system, were rounded and completed by an original doctrine, which represented doubt as an instrument of wisdom, moderation and personal welfare. Before this time there had been much scepticism, but it had been of a vacillating and unordered kind, the indecision of the uncertain, and no one had thought of making it a stepping-stone to happiness. This Pyrrho did, and in it lies his chief originality.

The scepticism which Pyrrho instituted was an unyielding doubt, and one, paradox as it may seem, which was highly logical. In it Kant found the outlines of his Criticism traced in advance, and that too by a master-hand. Pyrrho admitted no difference between health and illness, life and death. He expected nothing, asked for nothing, believed in nothing. If he ever struggled with himself, the struggle was a silent combat, of which his heart was the one dumb witness. He was not simply a sceptic, nor yet merely a cynic ; he was a stoic, with a leaven of both. To the eternal question, "What am I?" he answered, "It matters not." He had but one true successor—Montaigne. The everlasting refrain, *Que sçay ie ?* is an echo, faint it may be,

but still an echo, of his own unperturbed indifference. The only refuge in the midst of the uncertainties to which man is ever a prey, lay, Pyrrho held, in an entire suspension of judgment. Between assertion and denial he did not so much as waver ; he balanced his opinion in a perfect equipoise. As there is no criterion of truth, his position was impregnable.

"There is," he taught, "nothing that is inherently beautiful or ugly, right or wrong, and hence nothing that can be defined as an absolute truth. Things in themselves," he added, "are diverse, uncertain and undiscernible. Neither sensation nor thought is capable of teaching the difference between what is true and what is false. As a consequence, the verdict of mind and of senses should be equally distrusted ; an opinionless impassability should be observed ; nothing should be denied, nothing should be affirmed ; or if one of the two seems necessary, let the affirmation and the denial be concurrent."

And happiness ? some one may ask. But that is happiness. Where there is indifference and apathy, there too is ataraxia, the perfect and unruffled serenity of the mind. If in act, word and thought, an entire suspension of judgment be maintained,—if men, and women too, and events and results and causes, concerning all of which we may have our fancies and our theories, but whose reality escapes us, are treated with complete indifference,—then do we possess an independent freedom, an unroutable calm. Once

freed from beliefs and prejudices, an exterior influence is without effect ; perfect impassability is obtained ; and with it comes the passionless serenity, the ataraxia, which is the goal of the sage.

Such in its broad outlines was Pyrrho's doctrine. Confute it who may. For the details the reader must turn to back book-shelves where speculative spiders are the only hosts, and there thumb the mildewed pages of Sextus Empiricus, Aristocles and Diogenes Laertius. It should be noted that Pyrrho's scepticism did not extend to virtue, which he was fond of saying is the one thing whose possession is worth the gift. At an advanced age he died, greatly esteemed by his townsmen, who to do him honour exempted all philosophers from taxation. But elsewhere he was forgotten, and at the time of his death his brilliancy was eclipsed by the rising glories of Epicurus.

When Epicurus addressed the public, he was no longer a young man. His early life had been an unbroken journey. No sooner was he settled in one place, than circumstances compelled him to seek another. These inconveniences did not prevent him from cultivating philosophy, for which from boyhood he evidenced a marked predilection. "In the beginning was chaos," his first tutor announced. "And where did chaos come from?" asked Epicurus. But to this the tutor had no answer, and the boy turned to Democritus.

To this master much of his subsequent philosophy is attributable, but his personal success was due to the charm of his manner and the seduction of his words. Syrians and Egyptians flocked to Athens to hear him speak, and few among them went away dissatisfied.

At that time the riot of war had demoralised society. The echoes from a thousand battle-fields had banished all sense of security. Greece, moreover, was as tired of speculations as of conflicts; the subtleties of the Lyceum had outwearied the most intrepid. In the midst of the general enervation, Epicurus came, like another Pyrrho, to tell the secret of Polichinelle, to paint pleasure and describe happiness. In the telling he made no mysteries; his hearers approached him without effort. Pleasure, he held, was too simple and unaffected to need logical demonstrations; and to make her acquaintance, common-sense was a better letter than mathematics. But pleasure should not be sought merely for pleasure's sake. It should be regarded as a means to an end. Between pleasure and pleasure there is always a choice. There are pleasures that should be shunned, and there are trials that should be endured. There is the pleasure that is found in the satisfaction of the flesh, and there is the pleasure which is found in the tranquillity of the mind. The one lasts but a moment, and wanes in repetition; the other endures through life, and increases with the years. All this Epicurus thoroughly understood. He had a maxim to the



effect that wealth does not consist in the vastness of possessions, but in the limitation of desires. He did not restrict his hearers to scanty enjoyments; on the contrary, he preached their multiplication, but it was a multiplication which was both a lure and a prohibition. He wished men to live so simply that pleasure, when it came, might seem even more exquisite than it is. Of all the high-roads to happiness, he pointed to prudence as the surest and most expeditious. The prudent are temperate in all things, unambitious and of modest requirements, and through this very prudence maintain the health of mind and body which in itself is the true felicity of the wise.

The Epicurean doctrine was one long lesson in mental tranquillity. Anything that ministered to contentment was welcomed, and all things that disturbed it were condemned. Among the latter were the gods.

“Ces dieux que l’homme a fait, et qui n’ont pas fait l’homme.”

The proper way to treat them was a difficult question. Epicurus had no taste for hemlock, and he found his garden very pleasant. He had no wish to flee, like Aristotle, in the night, nor mope, like Anaxagoras, in a dungeon. He was a teacher, not a martyr. His position, therefore, was one of extreme delicacy. On the one hand, he was obliged to consider his personal inconvenience; on the other, the superstitions of the masses. To respect the former and banish the

latter, Epicurus took the gods and juggled with them, and in the legerdemain they mounted to such altitudes that from them the vulgar had nothing left to hope or to fear. Their existence was openly admitted, and their intervention as openly denied. In words of devout piety he took from them the reins of government, and pictured their idleness as an ideal impassability. After that, Olympus was to let.

The early legends say that the first created thing was fear. After routing the gods, Epicurus undertook to banish dread ; *il timor della paura*, as the Italians have it in their insidious tongue—the fear of fright, or at least that particular form with which hallucinated antiquity was accustomed to terrify itself into repentant spasms. Aided by the materialism of his master, Epicurus looked across the tomb, and announced that there no tormenting phantoms lurked in ambush. The dissolution of the atoms composing the body was also a dissolution of the atoms composing the soul. This affirmation of nothing divested life of a constant anxiety. It took from it one more care. It made the tranquillity of the mind easier, and assured it against an idle pre-occupation.

This doctrine, far from giving free play to the passions, held them well in check. Epicurus could see two sides to a question as well as another. Morality and temperance even to abstinence were praised. His hearers were enjoined

to limit their desires, and at all times to be just and to be charitable. The virtues, too, were praised; and this not so much perhaps on account of their inherent beauty, as because they were safeguards against mental disturbance.

In disclosing his ideas, Epicurus necessarily refuted other theories; but his candour, his unalterable placidity and his luminous good faith, disconcerted his adversaries, whose infrequent reprisals he answered, if at all, with an epigram.

In disinteresting his adherents from all things and even from themselves, it was the wish of Epicurus to create, not a school of thought, but a something whose status should approach that of a general disbelief. It was to be a religion whose one dogma was repose. In this purpose he very nearly succeeded. By the terms of his will, his garden, his writings and authority descended from one disciple to another in perpetuity. There was then no statute of mortmain, and the terms of the testament remained in force for seven hundred years—in fact, down to the last gasp of classic antiquity.

The continuity which it enjoyed is perhaps less attributable to its dogmas than to a sentiment of great delicacy which pervaded it. Christianity teaches that all men are brothers, but Epicurism practised the lesson before it was taught. Its bonds were those of friendship. Cicero has given it to history that the Epicureans had one to another the most unselfish sentiments. There



was no community of goods. Friendship gave its own from a sense of pleasure and not from constraint.

During its long reign, Epicurism attracted many converts from other sects, but lost none of its own adherents. This singularity was explained by a wit of the baths, who, adjusting his toga, noted with the light banter of the day that it was easy enough to make a eunuch of a man, but another matter to make a man of a eunuch. It is possible that this *bel esprit* had grasped the doctrine better than his hearers. Certainly it has not always been thoroughly understood. Montesquieu accused it of corrupting Rome; but the accusation is groundless, for at its advent the Eternal City was one vast lupanar.

Seneca said of Epicurus that he was a hero disguised as a woman, and it is in this disguise that he is usually represented. The doctrine which he gave to the world seemed to praise sensuality where in reality it preached repose. Idlers in all times have halted at the appearance and omitted to go further. For this reason, if for none that is better, there has always been a false and a true Epicurism. Unhappily, the bastard has been best received, and in its reception it has managed to discredit both the philosopher and the philosophy.

Over the gateway to his olive-gardens Epicurus had written: "Enter, stranger; here all is fair; Pleasure lords the day." The sign was a bait,

and of a flavour far different from the repellent severity of the notice which swung from the Academe. There admittance was refused to those who did not know geometry. But when the stranger, attracted by the proffered allurements, entered the gardens, he found that the lording of pleasure meant health of body and of mind.

There were some who entered, and who, delighted at the teaching, remained. There were others who entered at one gate and passed out discomfited at another; and there was also a third class, who, noting the tenor of the invitation, and knowing that the host was a philosopher, passed on charmed with the idea that the gratification of the senses possessed the sanction of metaphysics. These latter necessarily compromised Epicurus; and when his doctrine passed from Athens to Rome, it had been preceded by a bad reputation. For this the excuse is, seemingly, small. Epicurus was as voluminous a writer as Voltaire; and if the Romans misunderstood him, it is either because their knowledge of Greek was slight, or else because they were content to accept his teaching on hearsay. Toward the close of the republic, the system—such little at least as was generally known—became largely the fashion; and the elegance of Rome, like the indolence of Athens, cloaked its corruption with a mind-woven mantle of imaginary philosophy.

In descending the centuries, its reputation has not improved. Epicurism is not now synony-

mous, as it once was, with refined debauchery ; yet at the dinner-tables of contemporary club-land there are many still unaware that he who is claimed as patron-saint had tastes so simple that his expense for food was less than an obolus a day, while Metrodorus, his nearest friend, expended barely a lepton more. Now and then, on high-days and festivals, a bit of cheese was eaten with sensual relish ; but it is a matter of history that the ordinary fare of these voluptuaries was bread dipped in water.

The national divinity of the Romans is unknown. To all but the hierophants his name was a secret. Cicero has admitted that to him it was undisclosed. A tribune was even put to death for having pronounced it. If, in such a matter, conjectures were worth anything, it would not be irrational to fancy that the deity who ranked as Jupiter's superior was Pavor, Fright.

The hardiest and foremost conquerors in the world, the descendants of a she-wolf's nursling, were timid as children before the unintelligibility of the universe. Their earliest gods were revealed in the thunder ; their belief was a panic ; and when the panic subsided, it was succeeded by a dull, unreasoning dread.

No other land has seen a vaster Pantheon. There were so many divinities that Petronius said it was easier for the traveller to meet a god than a man. The more there were, the less insecure they felt. When they conquered a country, they took the gods as part of the spoils, but they

treated them with great reverence ; the temples were left standing and the altars unharmed. This moderation was probably due less to a sense of duty than to fear. They were afraid of their own gods ; they were afraid of those of other nations ; and those of whom they knew the least seem to have frightened them most.

In those days there was no iconoclasm, nor was there any attempt to make proselytes. The whole sentiment of Roman antiquity was opposed to the suppression of a creed, and such an idea as supplanting one religion by another was unknown. This liberality was particularly manifest during the latter part of the republic. At that time a statue to Isis was erected vis-à-vis to Jupiter. Sylla escorted a Syrian goddess to Rome, and Mithra, who had been lured from the East, became very popular among the lower classes. But all this occurred after triumphant campaigns. When Rome was young, her gods, if equally numerous, were less concrete.

The religion of the Sabines and the Latins was the naturalism of their Aryan ancestors. In it the gods, if emblematic, were unimagined ; they were manifestations of the divine, but not actual divinities. Each new manifestation was a fresh revelation, to which the early Italiot was quick to give a name and found a worship ; but in the worship there was more of dread than of hope, the dread of the unknown and the invisible.

Gradually the gods became less abstract, but, as M. Boissier has hinted, they were probably

as lack-lustre as the imagination of the labourers that conceived them, and so remained dully and dimly perceived until peddlers from Cumæ and Rhegium came over with wares and legends. To their tales the Romans listened with marveling surprise. Their gods, like themselves, were poor and prosaic ; they had no history, no myths ; and with a pleasant and liberal sense of duty, they robed them with the shreds and tatters of Ionian verse.

At precisely what epoch this occurred is uncertain ; but as the art of writing was familiar to the Romans in very ancient times, and as it has been shown that the Roman alphabet was drawn from Eolo-Dorian characters, it is not unreasonable to infer that relations between the two races were established at a comparatively early date.

The gods to whom the freedom of the city was thus unwarily granted, grew and expanded with it, but their native charm had been lost in crossing the sea. The serene mythology in which they were nursed was supplanted by gloomy superstitions ; the gay and gracious fictions were dulled with grave chronicles ; and the gods, who at home were cordial and indulgent, developed under the heavy hand of their adopters into an inquisitive and irritable police.

Instead of being loved, they were feared, and the fear they inspired was the heartrending fright of a child pursued.

To the untrained minds of their supplicants they lurked everywhere, even in silence. They



were cruel and vindictive ; they tormented the Roman out of sheer wantonness, and for the mere pleasure of seeing him writhe. Plutarch has confided to posterity that in those days a man could not so much as sneeze without exposing himself to their anger. Under such circumstances, worship was not merely a moral obligation, it was a matter of business, a form of insurance against divine risks, in which the worshipper with naïve effrontery tried to bargain with the gods that they should hold him harmless. This effort was solemnised by a religious ceremony whose meaning had been forgotten, and during which the priests mumbled prayers in a jargon which they did not understand.

With a retrospect even of two thousand years, it is a little difficult to fancy that the Romans pinned their faith to these mummeries, yet such seems to have been the case. In Greece there was much incredulity, but it was the laughing incredulity of a boy who has disentangled himself from the illusions of the nursery. That of the Romans took a different form ; it was an irritated scepticism which vacillated between defiant negation and fervent belief. Doubtless there were enlightened men who took it all easily and with several grains of Attic salt ; but they were infrequent ; incredulity seems to have been the exception and in no wise the rule.

When the Roman, angered to exasperation, braved the gods with a sacrilege, at the first sign of impending danger he was quick to implore

their protection. Sylla, feeling in the humour, sacked Delphos and insulted Apollo; all of which, Plutarch says, did not prevent him, the first time he was frightened, from praying to the very god whose temple he had pillaged. And Sylla, it may be remembered, was the last one to harbour any unnecessary superstitions. If remorse was felt by such an accomplished ruffian as he, what could be expected of the mass of his compatriots, who, if equally ruffian, were far less accomplished?

In reading back through history, it seems as though the Romans hated their divinities and yet were afraid to show their hatred; and it seems too that had one of them met a god alone, that god would have fared badly. Indeed, it is probable that the majority were animated with a feeling of displeasure like to that of the Norse warrior who ardently wished to meet Odin that he might attack and slay him. Nevertheless, they attended to their religious ceremonies; though they did so, perhaps, very much as most people pay their taxes. Of two evils, they chose the least. But when it was found that Evemerus had announced that the gods were ordinary bullies, who had been deified because every one was afraid of them, it was very generally thought that the right nail had been struck full on the head. In any event the idea was highly relished; and when in a certain play an individual was introduced who denied that there was such a thing as a Providence, the applause of the audience was



appreciatively eruptive. It was like the sight of a sail to shipwrecked sailors.

This, however, was all very well in comedy, where any little blasphemy brought with it the thrill and flavour of forbidden fruit ; but tragedy was a different matter. There, it is said, when the hero announced his escape from the infernal regions, children screamed and women shuddered. And indeed the contemporary pictures of the land of shades seem well calculated to terrify even the valiant. In the imagination of the people, any life beyond the tomb was nearly synonymous with an eternal nightmare. Of actual and physical torture there was none, or at least none, they believed, for them. The vengeance of Jupiter descended only on Titans and insurgent kings ; it disdained the insignificance of the vulgar.

Nor was there any hope of happiness. The beatitude of the Elysian Fields was only for the anointed. The common mortal received neither reward nor punishment. The just and the unjust were plunged into the grotesque horrors of a fantastic night, from which, save on the stage, there was no escape.

The poets, admittedly, gave pictures of after-life that were other and more alluring than this, but their pictures were discredited ; and besides, between the conceptions of the dreamer and the opinions of the masses there is a chasm that is never bridged. To the general public the idea of immortality does not seem to have been a

consolation. Probably it partook something of the character of an embarrassing dilemma. On the one hand was the liberty to accept it for what it was worth ; on the other was the privilege to disbelieve in it entirely. There were doubtless not a few who took the latter course, and whose consequent freedom of thought must have been a cause of shuddering envy to the orthodox ; but so inextinguishable is the love of life, that the majority seem to have preferred to believe that existence, however miserable, was continued beyond the tomb, to adopting any theory which savoured of extinction. They were afraid, Seneca said, to go to Hades, and equally afraid not to go anywhere.

Toward the latter part of the republic, the credulity of the masses was somewhat impaired. Echoes of the *obita dicta* of the enlightened reached their ears. Besides, there was then little time for devotional exercises. Rome was in a ferment ; the tramp of soldiery was continuous ; cities were up at auction ; nations were outlawed ; institutions were falling ; laws were laughed at ; might was right, and magnificent vice triumphant. The field, then, was prepared for nothing if not a moralist, and Nature, who is often beneficent, produced one in the nick of time.

The annals of literature are harmonious with the name of Rome, yet Rome was the mother of but two men of letters—Cæsar and this moralist who was called Lucretius. Concerning the latter, history has been niggardly. It is said that he

was born when Cæsar was a child, and died when Vergil was putting on the *toga virilis*; but beyond these dates history is dumb.

Lucretius is known to be the author of a poem, the most exquisite perhaps in the Latin tongue; but after that is recorded there are no anecdotes to help the sentence out. "Veil thy days," Epicurus had said, and the passionate Roman took the maxim for a motto. How he lived or why he lived, has been and now always will be purely conjectural. Yet if there is no diary to tell of the poet's incomings and outgoings, it is not a difficult matter to familiarise oneself with his train of thought and to picture the circumstances that directed it.

During his childhood, Sylla and Marius were playing fast-and-loose with their armies and with Rome. As a boy he could have witnessed a massacre beside which St. Bartholomew's was a street row—the massacre of fifty thousand allies at the gates of Rome—and on the morrow he may have heard the cries of eight thousand prisoners who were being butchered in the circus; while Sylla, with the air of one accounting for a trivial incident, explained to the startled Senate that the uproar came from a handful of insurgents bellowing at the whip. Later came the revolt of Spartacus, the conspiracy of Cataline, the flight of the coward Pompey, and finally the passing and apotheosis of Cæsar. If such things are not enough to give impressions to a poet, then one may well wonder what are.

In a monograph on this subject,\* to which, it should be said in passing, the present writer is much indebted, M. Martha has noted that Lucretius believed in but one god. That god was Epicurus. "Deus ille fuit, deus," he exclaimed; and if the words sound exuberant, they may perhaps find an excuse in the fact that the Romans were very ignorant and Epicurus very wise. How he became acquainted with the works of the grave Athenian is unrecorded. In Rome, as has been hinted, contemporary acquaintance with them was scant and consisted of hearsay. At that time some fragmentary translations of Greek physics had been made, and it is possible that through them his attention was directed to materialism in general and Epicurism in particular. There is even a legend which represents him studying in Athens at the fountain-head. But however this may be, it is clear that Lucretius gave Rome her first real lesson in philosophy.

The doctrine which Lucretius preached to his compatriots was one of renunciation—renunciation of this world and renunciation of any hope of another. He was fanatical in his disbelief, and he expounded it with a vehemence and with an emphasis which, while convincing enough in its way, was yet in striking contrast to the apathy of Epicurus, who, serenely consistent to his principles, saw, as M. Martha says, no

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\* *Le Poème de Lucrèce.*

need to get excited when admonishing others to be quiet. But their tasks were dissimilar. Epicurus addressed himself to those who were already indifferent, while those who listened to Lucretius were still among the horrors of their original faith.

It was these horrors that Lucretius set about to dissipate. His imagination had caught fire on the dry materialism of Greece, and it was with the theory of atoms that he sought to rout the gods. The undertaking was not a simple matter. The abolition of the divine was an abolition of every tenet, political as well as devotional. The moment the atomistic theory was accepted, away went the idea that the phenomena of nature were dependent on the will of the gods; the whole phantasmagoria of religion faded, and with it the elaborate creed of centuries evaporated into still air. There was nothing left; even death was robbed of its grotesqueness.

To those who objected that in devastating the skies a high-road was opened to crime, Lucretius, pointing to the holocausts, the hecatombs and the sacrifices, answered, "It is religion that is the mother of sin."

"Religio peperit scelerosa atque impia facta."

Other teachers had tried to purify religion, but Lucretius wished nothing short of its entire suppression; it had been without pity for Rome, and he was without pity for it. He hacked and hewed it with all his strength, and with a strength that



was heightened by irony and science. The irony was not new to Rome, but the science was. Against the panic of superstition he opposed the tranquillity of common sense; against Pavor, Veritas, or at least that which seemed truth to him.

There is nothing classic about Lucretius except his materialism. The value of that is slight, but contemporary readers have found themselves startled at the modernity of his sentiments. The cry of disgust which came from him is identical with that which the latest singers have uttered. Their common pessimism has been echoed across the centuries. In many ways Lucretius may be considered Pyrrho's heir as well as that of Epicurus. Between the testators the difference is not wide. One addressed the mind, the other the heart; the ultimate object, the attainment of happiness, was the same. If their dual influence has been unimportant, it is perhaps because the goal is fabulous. In this respect Lucretius may then be considered their direct successor, and one, moreover, who had his own views regarding the possible improvement of the possessions which descended to him. Lucretius not only denied the existence of the gods, he denied the existence of happiness. There was none in this life, and in his negation of an hereafter there could be none in another. As for ambition, what is it but a desire for an existence in the minds of other people—a desire which when fulfilled is a mockery, and unfulfilled a tomb? And besides, to what does success lead? To honour, glory and

wealth? But these things are simulachres, not happiness. Any effort, any aspiration, any struggle, is vain.

“Nequidquam, quoniam medio de fonte leporum  
Surgit amari aliquid, quod in ipsis floribus angat.”

*Nequidquam!* In vain, indeed! How vain, few knew better than Alfred de Musset, when he paraphrased that immortal, if hackneyed, distich in lines like these:

“Au fond des vains plaisirs que j’appelle à mon aide,  
Je sens un tel dégoût que je me sens mourir.”

But Lucretius’ *nequidquam* applied not only to empty pleasures; it applied to all the illusions that circle life, and to all that drape the grave. His disenchantment needed but one thing to be complete, a visit from that thought which was afterwards to haunt De Vigny:

“Seul, le silence est grand, tout le reste est faiblesse.”

Whether or not the influence of Lucretius was great enough to effect a revolution, is difficult to determine. But this at least is certain: he was a popular poet, and the appearance of his work coincided with a great decline of superstition. The dread which had been multiplying temples subsided. Among the educated classes, atheism became the fashion. Those who were less indifferent occupied themselves in cooling their indignation, but believers were infrequent. Varro declared that religion was perishing, not from the attacks of its enemies, but from the negligence



of the faithless. The testimony of Lucilius is to the effect that no respect was shown to laws, religion, or to gods. To Cicero the latter were absurd; and the immortality of the soul, which Cæsar denied in the open senate, was to him a chimera. "In happiness," he said, "death should be despised; in unhappiness it should be desired. After it there is nothing." Cornelius Nepos looked back and saw temples in ruins, unvisited save by archaic bats. Religion was a thing of the past. Here and there it received that outward semblance of respect which is the due of all that is venerable, but faith had faded and fright had ceased to build. The Romans, some one has suggested, were not unlike those fabled denizens of the under-earth, who suddenly deserted their subterranean palaces, left their toys, their statues and their gods to the darkness, and, emerging into the light, saw for the first time the pervasive blue of the skies and the magnificent simplicity of nature.

Later, there was a revival. The restoration of religion was undertaken as a governmental necessity. The Senate proclaimed the divinity of Augustus, and thereafter the Cæsars usurped what little worship was left. That there was much faith in their divinity is doubtful. Valerius Maximus appears to have had no better argument than that they could be seen, which was more than could be said of their predecessors. Vespasian seems to have taken the whole thing as a joke. "I am becoming a god," he said with a

smile as he died. Meanwhile, in the general incredulity, the earlier deities lost even the immortality of mummies. Under Diocletian a pantomime was given with great success. It was called, *The Last Will and Testament of Defunct Jupiter.*

## CHAPTER III.

### THE CONVULSIONS OF THE CHURCH.

THE earliest barbarian that invaded Rome was a Jew. He did not thunder at the gates; he went unheralded to the Taberna Meritoria—a squalid inn on the Tiber that reeked with garlic—broke his fast, and then sauntered forth, as any modern traveller might do, to view the city. His first visit was to his compatriots at the foot of the Janiculum. To them he whispered something, went away, returned and whispered again. After a while he spoke out loud. Some of his hearers contradicted him; he spoke louder. The peddlers, the rag-pickers, the valets-de-place and hook-nosed porters grew tumultuous at his words. The ghetto was raided, and a complaint for inciting disorder was lodged against a certain Christus, of whom nothing was known and who had managed to elude arrest.

Who was this Christus? Apart from the Gospels, canonical and apocryphal, history gives no answer. He is not mentioned by Philo or Justus. Other makers of contemporary chronicles are equally silent. Josephus makes a

passing allusion to him, but that passing allusion is very generally regarded as the interpolation of a later hand. It may be added, that while Justus and Josephus say nothing of Jesus, they yet describe Essenism, and in those days many of the tenets of the early Church were indistinguishable from it. It seems, therefore, not unfair to suppose that either these historians knew nothing of the teaching of the Christ, or else that they considered it too unimportant to be deserving of record.

An early legend has, however, been handed down from Celsus, a Jew who lived about the time of Hadrian. The work containing this legend has been lost, and is known only through fragments which Origen has preserved. In substance it amounts to this. A beautiful young woman lived with her mother in a neglected caphar. This young woman, whose name was Mirjam—Mary—supported herself by needlework. She became betrothed to a carpenter, broke her vows in favour of a soldier named Panthera, and wandering away gave birth to a male child called Jeschu,—Jeschu being a contraction of the Hebrew Jehoshua, of which Jesus is the Greek form. When Jeschu grew up, he went as servant into Egypt, which was then the head-quarters of the magicians. There he learned the occult sciences, and these gave him such confidence that on his return he proclaimed himself a god.

The story of Mirjam and Panthera is repeated

in the Gemaras—the complements and commentaries of the Talmud—and also in the Toledoth Jeschu, an independent collection of traditions relative to the birth of the Christ. These later accounts differ from that of Celsus merely in this, that Mirjam is represented as a hairdresser, while Panthera or Pandira is described as a freebooter and a ruffian. It may be noted that, in a work on this subject, Mr. Baring-Gould states that St. Epiphanius, when giving the genealogy of Jesus, brings the name Panthera into the pedigree.\*

The importance of these legends is slight, and the question of their truth or falsity is of small moment. That which it is alone important to consider is the individuality of the Saviour; and the point whose conveyance has been sought is simply this, that beyond a restricted circle nothing was known of it during the first century of the present era.

Jesus, the Anointed, the Christ, was the flower of the Mosaic Law. The date of his birth is uncertain, and the story of his early years is vague. The picture of his boyhood, in which he is represented as questioning the Darschanim, the learned men, is, however, familiar to us all. In the schools—the houses of Midrasch, as they were called—he heard the sacred books of his race expounded, and learned such lessons in ethics as were obtainable from the moralists of

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\* The Lost and Hostile Gospels.

the day. Meanwhile the dream of Israel, the forecast of a triumphant future, the advent of a Messiah, the abrupt upheaval which was to be both the beginning of the end and the end of the beginning, the punishment of the wicked, the sanctification of the faithful, the remission of sins and the magnificence that was to be, were constantly discussed before him. As he grew older, he seems to have placed little credence on these prophecies ; he waived them aside, retaining only the lessons in ethics, to which, in advancing years, as his own ministry began, he added an idea which he had gathered from one preaching in the wilderness, an idea which his own originality heightened with a newer force and flavour, and which formed the subsequent corner-stone of the Christian Church.

At that time his belief in himself appears to have been slight. To the title of Messiah he made no claim. It was given to him unsought by his earliest adherents, who later imagined a genealogy which certain factions of Christianity declined to accept. Among these, the Ebionites and Docetæ are the more noteworthy. To the one he was an ordinary individual ; to the other, a phantasm.

The story of his birth is one which is common to many religions. In a fragment of Irenæus it is stated that the Gospel according to St. Matthew was written to the Jews, who earnestly desired a Messiah of the royal line of David. To satisfy them that their wish was fulfilled was not an easy



matter. The Aramaic Gospel to the Hebrews, as well as the Gospel according to St. Mark, offered no evidence that Jesus was the one they sought. But the early Church had the boldness of youth. Against the existing Gospels she opposed a new evangel, one which was more complete and convincing than its predecessors, and one, moreover, which bore the revered and authoritative name of Matthew. St. Matthew, however, had then long been dead, and his ability to write in Greek does not appear to have been suspected.

The Gospel which the Church attributed to him is to-day very generally regarded as a compilation of its predecessors, with the addition of a genealogy. The Messiah, it had been prophesied, would be of the house of David, and accordingly an effort was made to show that Jesus was of the royal race. The royal race seems then to have been extinct; but that is a side issue. The one point to be noted is that the descent of Jesus is claimed through Joseph, who, it is stated, was not his father.

The genealogy completed, the historian turned his attention to two passages in what is known to-day as the Old Testament. The first of these passages occurs in Isaiah (vii. 14—16), the second in Micah (v. 2). The first relates to a child that the Lord was to give as a sign, and the second designates Bethlehem as his future birthplace. It may be noted that the term in Isaiah which refers to the child's mother, and which was after-

wards rendered into *παρθένος*, is *olme*, and *olme* means young woman. The pseudo-Matthew, however, preferred a narrower description, and represented the mother as a virgin. In regard to the second passage, there is doubtless some mistake, as all impartial commentators are agreed that the nativity of Jesus took place, not at Bethlehem, but at Nazareth.

There are, however, few great events which have been handed down through history unswathed in fables and misconceptions. The Gospel according to St. Matthew—and the remark holds true of the others—was written without any suspicion that it would be subjected to the scrutiny of later ages ; it was written to prepare man for the immediate termination of the world. Such misstatements as it contains may therefore be regarded with a lenient eye.

But to return to the point. However slight was the belief of Jesus in himself, it is tolerably clear that the pretensions of his adherents angered the Nazarenes. They declined to admit the royal and supernatural claims that were advanced in favour of one whose kinsmen were of the same clay as themselves. To them he was merely a graceful rabbi. Yet when he addressed the wondering fishers of Galilee, his success was both great and immediate. His electric words thrilled their rude hearts ; they were both charmed and coerced by the grave music which he evoked from the Syro-Chaldaic tongue ; their belief in him was spontaneous ; they regarded him as

dwelling in a sphere superior to that of humanity; gladly would they have proclaimed him king; and it was from their unquestioning confidence that Jesus drew a larger trust in himself. Certainly his personal magnetism must have been very great. There is a legend which represents him as being far from well-favoured, and this legend, like the others, is doubtless false. It is probable that he possessed that exquisite, if effeminate, type of beauty which is not infrequent in the East. One may fancy that his tiger-tawny hair glistened like a flight of bees, and that his face was whiter than the moon. In his words, his manner and appearance, there must have been a charm which was both unusual and alluring. Indeed, there were few who were privileged to come into direct contact with him that did not love him at once; but the multitude stood aloof. It refused to recognise the son of David in the mystic anarchist who had not where to lay his head.

The ministry of Jesus did not extend over three years. M. Renan thinks it possible that it did not extend much over one. But the time, however short, was well filled. On its lessons, races and nations have subsisted ever since. The pity of it is that the purport of the instruction should have been misunderstood.

It has been already hinted that the cornerstone of the Christian Church was formed of an idea which Jesus gathered from John the Baptist. When, therefore, he sent forth his disciples, he

gave them no other message than that which he had himself received: "Go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand." And he added: "Verily, I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel before the Son of Man be come." "All these things shall come upon this generation," were his explicit words to his hearers and disciples. After the episodes in the wilderness, Jesus went into Galilee, saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand." And a little later he addressed his auditors in these words: "Verily, I say unto you that there be some of them that stand by which shall in nowise taste of death till they see the kingdom of God come with power."

Citations of this kind might be multiplied indefinitely. If the testimony of the Gospels is to be believed, it is evident that the disciples were convinced that the fulfilment of the prophecy was a matter of months or at most of a few years. They lived, as M. Renan has noted, in a state of constant expectation. Their watch-word was *Maran atha*, The Lord cometh. In fancy they saw themselves enthroned in immutable Edens, dwelling among realised ideals amid the resplendent visions which the prophets had evoked.

It was this error that formed the corner-stone of the Christian Church. When later it was recognised as such, the Church interpreted the "kingdom of God" as the establishment of the Christian religion.

But Jesus had no intention of founding a new religion, and still less of substituting a personal doctrine for the Mosaic Law. He came to prepare men, not for life, but for death. The virtues which he praised most highly were those of renunciation and abnegation of self. His one thought was centred in the approaching end of the world. It was on this belief that the value of his teaching rested ; viewed in any other light, his continual condemnation of labour would be inexplicable ; while his prohibition against wealth, his adjuration to forsake all things for his sake, the blow which he struck at the virility of man, his praise of celibacy, his disregard of family ties, his abasement of marriage, and his contempt even of the dead, would be without meaning.

The faith which he inculcated was a necessary preparation for the event then assumed to be near at hand. It was exacted as a means of grace. In it the reason, the understanding, had no part. It was the complete submission of the intelligence, a resolution to accept dogmas without question. In the moral certainty which his believers possessed of the immediate realisation of their hopes, it is not surprising that this faith should have been readily accorded. The enigma lies in the faith of the subsequent centuries. It may be, however, that the doctrine which has descended to us was merely the exoteric teaching. Of at least fifty Gospels that were written, four only have been recognised by the Church. Of these, the originals do not exist, and their supposed



texts have been so frequently re-touched, that more than thirty thousand variations are said to have been discovered. It may be, then, that there was another doctrine, an esoteric teaching, which was never fully disclosed, or else has been lost in the dust-bins of literature. This possibility is strengthened by the fact that Valentine is recorded as asserting that he had received an esoteric doctrine which Jesus imparted only to the most spiritual among his disciples; and the possibility is further heightened by the incongruity between the sublimity of the genius which was the Christ's and the tenancy of a belief in the realisation of the visions of Daniel.

Jesus was in no sense a scientist, but his insight was piercing and his intuitions clairvoyant. He was the most transcendent of rebels, but he was possessed of a comprehension too unerring to be deluded by the utopias of dream. It may be, then, that in the solitudes of the desert he conceived some such system as that which was taught by his predecessor in Nepal. To him, as to the Buddha, life was a tribulation. And what fairer paradise could there be than the infinite rest of chaos? Let the sullen rumble of accursed life once be quelled, and God's kingdom would indeed be come with power. What save this could have been that peace which passeth all understanding?

It may be remembered that according to the Hebrew sages man survived only in his children. The doctrine of resurrection, and the attendant



theory of rewards and punishments, was unknown to them. But at the time of the advent of the Christ, these ideas were part of the teaching of the Pharisaic party. Where they were gathered is uncertain. They may have been acquired through acquaintance with the Parsis—and certainly Satan bears an astonishing resemblance to Ahriman—or they may have merely represented the natural development of Messianic hopes. In any event they seem to have pre-occupied Jesus greatly; and when questioned about them, he gave answers which, while delicate in their irony, are seldom other than vague.

It is probable that at the time when the questions were addressed to him, his system, which owing to his sudden death was perhaps never fully elaborated, was then merely in germ. But that he reflected deeply over the views of the patriarchs there can be no doubt, and it is equally indubitable that he considered the high-road to salvation to be discoverable, if anywhere, through them. The logic of it amounted to this: Life is evil; the evil subsists through procreation; ergo, abolish procreation and the evil disappears.

Many texts from the canonical Gospels might be given in support of this statement, but to cultivated readers they are doubtless too familiar to need repetition here. For the moment, therefore, it will suffice to quote two passages from the lost Gospel according to the Egyptians, a chronicle which was known to exist in the second half of the second century, and was then regarded

as authoritative by certain Christian sects. The passages are to be found in the *Stromata* of Clement of Alexandria, iii. 6—9. In one, the Saviour speaks as follows: "I am come to destroy the work of the woman: of the woman, that is, of concupiscence, whose works are generation and death." In the other passage, Salome, having asked how long men should live, the Lord answered, "So long as you women continue to bear children."

These passages, if authentic, and there is little reason to think them otherwise, seem tolerably conclusive. In any event, it was this idea that peopled with hermits the deserts of Nitria and Scete, and it was this same idea which in its weakened force filled those bastilles of God, the convents and monasteries of pre-mediæval days. Cerdo, Marcion, and others of lesser note, advocated a doctrine of which it was evidently the starting-point; in many religious communities its influence is still distinguishable; but the question as to whether or not the idea as here represented was really the one on which the thoughts of the Saviour were turned, seems best answerable in the affirmative, if for no other reason than that it is less extravagant and more logical to regard the Christ as a practical philosopher than as an alluring visionary. And if he was not the one, he must have been the other. Certainly no one can claim for him any higher originality than that which was manifested in the form and flavour of his parables. He was the most entrancing of

nihilists, but he was not an innovator. Others before him had instituted a reaction against the formalism of the Judaic creed. The austerity of his ethics, the communism which he preached, his contempt of wealth, and his superb disdain of everything which was of this world, were integral parts of the doctrine of the Essenes. The conception of a Supreme Being, differing in benignity from the implacable terrorism which Jehovah exerted, had been already begun by the prophets. Jesus unquestionably amplified the Father of Israel into the God of Humanity, but he did not invent Him. It may be further noted that Jesus had no thought of representing himself as an incarnation or descendant of the Deity. To such a title he made no claim, nor, except in certain passages inserted in the fourth Gospel, is he ever represented as using it. If Son of God at all, he was so in the sense that might apply to all men, and of which the address beginning, "Our Father who art in heaven," is a fitting example.

Yet this at least may be said. He created pure sentiment, the love of the ideal. He gave the world a fairer theory of æsthetics, a new conception of beauty, and he brought to man a dream of consolation which has outlasted centuries and taken the sting from death. So singular and powerful was the affection which he inspired, that after the crucifixion, Mary of Magdala, in the hallucinations of her love, asserted that he had arisen. He arose, indeed,

but, as elsewhere suggested, it was in the adoring hearts of his disciples. And had it been otherwise, had their natures been less vibrant, their sympathies less exalted, less susceptible to psychological influences, the world would have lost its suavest legend, and the name of the pale Nazarene would have faded with those of the Essenes of the day.

M. Renan says that Rome, through relations with Syria, was probably the first occidental city that learned of the new belief. There were then, he has noted, many Jews there. Some were descendants of former prisoners of war, others were fugitives; but all were poor, miserable and down-trodden. To this abject colony Christianity brought an unexpected hope. The ideal, it is true, had fled from earth; but was it not possible to find it again above?

Many there were that accepted the new creed unquestioningly, but some of their more conservative brethren, disturbed at its dissidence with their orthodox tenets, denounced their compatriots to the government. It is possible that a certain amount of suppression was then exercised, but it appears to have been accidental and momentary. The Romans were familiar with too many deities to be alarmed at the advent of a new one. Their polytheistic tendencies made it quite easy for them to believe in a god, made man, and the suppressions which ensued were ordered in the interest of the public peace. The Christians were evidently regarded as seditious;

in denying the divinity of the Cæsars they were guilty of nothing less than high-treason. They were punished accordingly, but their punishment had no religious signification. The Epicureans might easily have been subjected to analogous treatment, but the Epicureans were philosophers, and as such saw no reason for pulling a wry face at harmless mummeries.

Then, too, the early Christians seem to have made themselves extremely unpopular. The Pantheon was most hospitable; its niches were free to every comer. But the believers in the Nazarene would have none of it. They not only refused any allegiance to Olympian potentates, but they would not permit their own God to consort with them. It was tantamount to saying that Jupiter's society was pernicious. There were few indeed that pinned much faith to that opulent divinity; but the open show of respect which was demanded as a governmental necessity was generally accorded, and nothing else was asked. The Christians, moreover, gave offence by their mode of life. They appear to have been a quiet, silent and possibly inoffensive sect, who avoided the forum and the circus, and passed their hours in sullen seclusion. Added to this, they predicted the approaching end of the world, which was obstinate enough to continue to revolve through spacious voids of which they were utterly ignorant; and this prophecy on their part could not have been regarded otherwise than as an open slur on the imperial optimism of the day.



It was doubtless about this time that the edict, *Non licet esse Christianos*, was passed—an edict which with curious clairvoyance appears to have been directed mainly against those Romans who were tempted to embrace the new belief. It is one of the platitudes of history that Rome fell through her rottenness. Yet, as M. Renan has been at no loss to show, Rome fell when her soldiery became converted. The spirit of peace which pervaded the early Church enervated a nation; the virility of the most belligerent of races was sapped. But this is a digression. During its infancy, Christianity was smitten by a disease which has been likened to croup. This croup was endemic in Alexandria, and from there floated over to Rome. It was called Gnosticism.

Gnosticism was a compound of corrupt Platonism, Hinduism and charlatanism. To abandon M. Renan's simile and take another, it was the bridge over which the world passed from paganism. Gnosticism gathered up theosophy, mysticism, rites, ceremonials and art—everything, in fact, which seemed worth the gathering—and passed them all to Christianity, which, thus equipped, set out on its triumphant career. But not at once. The populace, as has been hinted, was not favourably disposed. Tertullian says that a Christian was defined as an enemy of gods, emperors, laws, customs, and Nature itself. To the believers in Jesus was ascribed the influence of that which the modern Roman calls the *jettatura*. They were held to be connected with



every calamity ; and after each disaster the Eternal City echoed with shrieks from uncounted throats, *Christianos ad leonem !* To the circus with the Christians ; let them camp with the beasts ! It was then that Christianity learned to hate.

Meanwhile, the Ghetto mounted like a flood. Its ascension was favoured by many things. The atmosphere of Rome dripped with metaphysics, and through it had passed a new and pervading sense of lassitude. Nero was dead ; and Nero, it may be noted, was paradox incarnate. He was an imperial nightmare that was far from unpopular ; a drama of the horrible, with a joke for finale ; a caricature of the impossible in a crimson frame ; a Cæsar whose follies were laws and whose laws were follies ; a maniac whose cell was the world and whose delirium was fame ; a sceptred acrobat, with a throne for spring-board ; an emperor jealous of a tenor ; and a cabotin jealous of the gods ; in fact, the antithesis of the humdrum. Under him, Rome saw luxury and ferocity hand-in-hand ; cruelty married to pleasure. Christians mantled in flame illuminated the gardens of a prince. Intoxication had no frontiers. Life itself was a breathless chase after impossible delights. But now all was quite different, and it was with something of that lassitude which succeeds an orgy that the Romans found themselves tired even of themselves. They could not all have the moon for mistress. What was there left for them to do ? Christianity offered itself, and as often as not Christianity was accepted.

After Constantine had used the new belief as a masquerade, its spread was rapid. Julian, indeed, threatened to prevent such of the Galileans from wearing their heads as refused to aid him in the reconstruction of polytheism, but the halt under him was momentary. The impulsion continued unchecked; the intermediate persecutions had made it notorious; the advance continued, but in the advance the watchword, *Maran atha*, had lost its meaning. The end of the world was no longer expected. Fortune favouring, Christianity turned optimist. Yet paganism was not dead; it had merely fallen asleep. Isis gave way to Mary; apotheosis was replaced by canonization; the divinities were succeeded by saints; and, Africa aiding, the Church surged from mythology with the Trinity for tiara.

At the close of the fourth century, the Church was practically mistress of civilization. Her sway was immense and uncontested. And what a sway it was! Temples, statues and manuscripts were destroyed. Bands of monks went about pillaging and demolishing whatever they could. The Bishop Theophilus, after destroying the temple of Serapis, set fire to the Alexandrian library, which contained nearly all the literary treasures of the past. But the power of the Church, though magnificent, was brief. At the moment when her glory was most brilliant, when Julian was forgotten and persecution had ceased, a mixed multitude of barbarians beat at the gates of Rome, and in their victorious onslaught swept antiquity away.

When the Church found herself surrounded by unfamiliar kings and chieftains—a set of fair, proud, honest and brutal ignoramuses, who wandered from place to place, or shut themselves up and got drunk in their strongholds, and with whom she had nothing in common—her dominant idea was to govern them. In this she succeeded: strength, however great, is defenceless against cunning, and the Church then was the depository of all the intelligence of the age. But her first act was to save herself from the violence to which society fell a prey. To save herself, she announced the principle of the separation of spiritual and temporal power. This accepted, she announced as corollary the superiority of the spiritual over the temporal. The rest was easy. Free inquiry was condemned; belief was forced; heretics were persecuted; and out of the ashes of imperial Rome a mitred prelate dragged a throne. *L'Eglise, c'était lui.* Through his influence the barbarians were led to baptism like brutes to the slaughter. Those who objected were baptised by force. Dagobert had all Gaul baptised in this way. Thereafter the Church presided over an eclipse of the intellect that lasted a thousand years. During that thousand years it was blasphemy to think; yet over those ages that are known as dark there hovered that prescience of fairer things which is the accompaniment of night.

Meanwhile, in a corner of the Orient whither some of the flotsam and jetsam of civilization

had drifted, a college of charlatans wearied the centuries with abstractions and discussions on words. Their earlier disputes are legendary. One of them concerned the soul. Was the soul round or oblong? This question was never satisfactorily determined. Another proposition which was much discussed concerned the Saviour. Was he, or was he not, co-eternal with God? The Council at Nicæa, to which appeal was made, decided that he was both; and the Church anathematised all those who disagreed with its decision. In spite of the anathema, certain erudites suggested a compromise which involved the acceptance or rejection of an iota: ὁμοούσιος signified consubstantial, ὁμοιούσιος signified like as to the substance. If the one term were replaced by the other, the difficulty, it was argued, would be removed. But this solution was too easy to be well received, and the absence of that iota caused the death of many thousand dissenters.

Later, Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople, asserted that Mary, being of the earth earthy, could not rightly be considered the mother of a God. This assertion was condemned as heretical by the General Council of Ephesus, and it was ordered that those who accepted it should be exterminated at once. Eutyches the archimandrite announced the contrary of that which Nestorius had advanced. He was excommunicated; the true doctrine being that Jesus was both a perfect divinity and a perfect man. Then sud-

denly the Orient became peopled with heretics ; some held to Nestorius, others to Eutyches. In the second quarter of the sixth century, Justinian, an emperor who is said to have been so illiterate that he could not write his own name, and who in consequence was easily bored by subtleties, confiscated the property of all who were suspected either of Nestorian or Eutychian sympathies. In spite of these efforts, heresy was not suppressed ; or perhaps it would be more exact to say that when one was suppressed, its place was immediately filled by another. At last, Heraclitus in utter exasperation issued an edict forbidding any one to speak of the single or double nature of Jesus the Christ. This edict itself was regarded as heretical, and continued to be so regarded until Constant published another which forbade any theological discussion, no matter of what kind, nature or description. To this edict, which the Pope Theodore qualified as an abominable subtlety, no one paid any attention. Constant, however, refused to be idle. He tried to check the spread of monachism, which at that time was enormous, and failing, went to Rome and sacked it.

In the eighth century appeared the heresy known as that of the iconoclasts. The Church, as has been hinted, adopted much of the pomp of paganism, and with advancing years made herself gorgeous with crosses, images and tapers ; but a particular predilection was manifested in favour of big dolls, whether of marble, bronze or



precious metals. To this the iconoclasts objected; with the Emperor Leo for chief, they destroyed the statues of Jesus, of Mary, of the saints and angels, wherever such statues were to be found; and for many years persecuted and massacred the worshippers. Yet when the Empress Irene assumed the purple, the iconoclasts were at once pursued with a vigour that was riotous and avenging. It is just possible that this terrible lady perceived that the destruction of images was the destruction of art. But be this as it may, the Beautiful had been sadly frightened, and thereafter remained invisible until lured to view again by the enticements of the Renaissance.

In Europe, matters were even worse. There was a continual panic, a ceaseless fear. There was no security, either civil or ecclesiastical. Diseases of the mind and body were omnipresent; famine at times was so ruthless that anthropophagy was openly practised. The only theory of right was might, and of this the Church held the reins. Many of the bishops were little better than bandits. They passed their days in wandering from place to place and in pillaging right and left. In a forgotten tale of Cervantes, one amiable scoundrel hails another, "Does your Grace happen to be a highwayman?" "Yes," the other answers, "in the service of God and honest people." Eliminate the courtesy and replace it with a blow from a bludgeon, and the question and answer may be represented as repeated indefinitely for five centuries.



Those of the clergy whose tastes were less adventurous devoted themselves to study and were looked upon as magicians ; others, in the dim recesses of undrained monasteries, weary of all things, and most of life, gave themselves up unresistingly to acedia, the delirious pessimism of the cloister, and shrieked for death.

It was in those days that a demon of uncommon ugliness flitted through the gloom of the abbeys, whispering gaily to the cowering monks, "Thou art damned, and thou, and thou art damned for all eternity !" In the cathedrals, maidens had seen a beckoning fiend, who through shudders of song had called them down to swell the red quadrilles of hell. These visitors of course were legates of Satan. And who was Satan? His biography, though well filled, need not be long.

Satan was Jew from horn to hoof. The registry of his birth is contained in the evolution of Hebraic thought. In early ages, when sabaism, the primitive polytheism of the Semitic tribes, narrowed into monotheism, Jehovah was worshipped as the one real divinity. In his hands were the springs of all that is, of good and evil as well. But this idea was transient. About the Eternal were grouped a number of spirits whose duty it was to supervise the works of man. Among these celestials was one whose rôle was limited to that of accuser. This rôle appears to have been gradually expanded into one of general hostility. Above was Jehovah, below was man ; while between the two were the inimical eyes of

Satan. In the younger books of the Old Testament, Satan is little more than a detective ; in the New Testament he is an inciter to evil. But during the intervening period two things seem to have happened. The Hebrews had communicated with the Parsis, and Satan, banished from heaven, had assumed all the powers and attributes of Ahriman. Thereafter he was hatred incarnate, the spirit that *stets verneint*, the fallen son of a mighty father, a disinherited prince who had founded another monarchy and called it Hell.

It is in this guise that he appears in the New Testament, and the delicate moral of the Synoptic Gospels is perhaps little more than the prefigurement of the endless conflict between right and wrong. But be this as it may, it is evident that after Satan and the Saviour had met, the apparitions of the former became a matter of frequent occurrence. Did not his minions the succubæ and incubæ haunt with lascivious lips the sleep of holy men and holier women? Was it not through his artifices that St. Victor was seduced by a beautiful girl? Did he not personally menace and threaten St. Maur? The stone which he flung at the inflexible St. Dominick is a matter too well attested to be susceptible of doubt. See how he tempted St. Anthony. In fact, unvisited by him it was difficult to be considered a saint at all. In the middle ages he was everywhere. The atmosphere was so heavy with his legions, that the Messalians made spit-

ting a part of their devotions. From encountering him at every turn, the world at last became used to his ways, and thereupon imagined that pact in which the devil agrees, in exchange for the soul, to furnish whatever is desired. The case of Gerbert is one in point. According to the gossip of the day,\* Gerbert, once a Spanish student, afterwards Archbishop of Ravenna, and subsequently Pope, entered into an agreement of this kind, and one night the devil came in person to claim him. It was the agreement they had made together long before in Cordova, where Gerbert, finding his studies too arduous, had signed the bond in exchange for the royal road. It was the devil who had taught him all he knew—algebra, clock-making, and how to become a Pope. It was clear as day that he would have known none of these things without infernal assistance. Gerbert resists, but Mephisto proves his claim. “You did not think me a logician, did you?” are said to have been his historic words, and, presto! Gerbert disappears in a fork of lambent flame.

When Christianity first raised its head, it viewed the pagan gods as part of the cohorts of Satan. These cohorts Tertullian divided into two classes—the rebels who had been banished from heaven in Satan’s train, and the angels who in antediluvian days had fallen in love with the daughters of men. Their queen was Lili Abi

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\* Michelet: *Histoire de France*.

(Lilith), Adam's first wife, from whose name our lullaby is said to be derived. The Dusii, a later subdivision who have given us the deuce, were so well known to St. Augustine that he declared it an impertinence to deny their existence. These latter appear to have been a malignant set of incubi who made a prey of women. Mr. Lecky says that but little over a hundred years ago an annual mass was given in the abbey of Poisey that the nuns might be preserved from their wiles.

Satan, meanwhile, lost much of his dignity. Mice, wolves and toads became his symbols, his auxiliaries, and even his momentary incarnations. Throughout the middle ages no sorcerer was considered well equipped without a sleek black cat, an animal to which, like many a sensible mortal, the devil appears to have been greatly attached. It was in the company of the cat that the sabbat was attended. The sabbat was popularly held to be a mass offered to Satan, and any one suspected of attending it, or being in any wise affiliated with Mephisto, was burned. The first punishment for this offence occurred in Toulouse in 1275. During the next fifty years over four hundred people were burned in the neighbourhood. In the fifteenth century all Christianity joined in a hunt for witches; and the hunt continued for three hundred years, until every sorcerer had disappeared and Salem put out her bonfires. In each country the warmth of the chase was in direct proportion to the power of

the clergy. To spare a witch was considered an insult to the Almighty. Luther was particularly vehement on this point ; so, too, was Calvin ; and Wesley was as great a fanatic as any. Montaigne was one of the first to laugh at witchcraft ; but Montaigne, like all advanced thinkers, was wickedly incredulous. The hunt, as has been hinted, was continued, and it was kept up not only until all the witches had disappeared, but until all belief in the devil had gone with them. Persecution subsided when scepticism began. The history of the Inquisition is exactly analogous. When the world began to think, intolerance ceased.

During this time Satan was not otherwise idle. He continued to appear in the most unexpected and surprising manner, and that, too, up to within comparatively recent dates. His last historical appearance is in a pleasant anecdote in which he is represented as visiting Cuvier. He enters the great man's study with his usual *quærens quem devoret* air. "What do you wish of me?" Cuvier asks curtly, for he is annoyed at the intrusion. "I've come to eat you." But Cuvier's shrewd eye had already examined him. "Horns and hoofs!" he retorts ; "granivorous ! You can't do it." Whereupon, outfaced by science, Satan vanished through an in-quarto, never to appear again save when, in the garb and aspect of a policeman, he visits the conscience of the mis-demeanant.

But to return to the middle ages. The chroni-



cles of Cassien, Vincent de Beauvais and Raoul Glaber, are filled with lurid pictures of those dark days. Disasters followed one another with the regularity of the seasons. The desolation which the Church had sought to stay had increased to terrific proportions. The empire of Karl the Great had been swept away as utterly as that of the Cæsars. Throughout Europe there was a hideous fear, a breathless expectation. The Antichrist had come. His presence was signalled from the pulpit. Churches, monasteries, donjons and burgs, echoed and thrilled with the rumour of his sacrileges. Now he was the son of the Popess Johanna, conceived during a pontifical procession ; now he was a ruffian marauder, burning basilicas and violating the tombs of the saints. In the ninth century there was an eclipse of the sun which frightened a king to death. In 945, while a cyclone swept over Paris, monsters armed with battle-axes dropped from the skies, and, rushing into a church, tore down the pulpit, which they used as a battering-ram to destroy a neighbouring house. In 988, a wolf entered the cathedral of Orleans, and, seizing the bell-rope in his mouth, rang out the knell of the world. It was evident to every one that the trumpets of the last judgment were soon to be heard. At once there was a frantic effort to make peace with God ; there was a rush for the monasteries, and a general donation of property to the Church. The *dies iræ* was at hand. The exact date was known. It was to come on the 25th of March,



A.D. 1000. An hysterical rictus passed over the face of Christendom; the forgotten hope was to be realized! At last the *dies illa* arrived. In the Holy See the Pope sat, enervated and impatient, counting the minutes and awaiting the climax through the succeeding fractions of each hour. In the churches, the crowd, with heads bowed to the ground, felt time limp by and yet saw no sign. The expectation lasted four days and four nights. Then, so runs the chronicle, an immense dragon rushed through the open skies. In an abbey the eyes of a Christ were seen to weep. Yet still the earth remained unsundered and humanity unclaimed.

When the panic subsided, the Church found that her wealth had been largely increased. Her power, too, had developed. The cowl was everywhere, and everywhere it was dreaded. This dread was not unmingled with disgust; the fanaticism, asceticism and illiteracy of the clergy resulted as often as not in delirium and satyrisis. Indeed, their customs were neither amiable nor cleanly. The different bulls which the Popes launched at them make it easy to see of what they were capable, and difficult to fancy of what they were not. But their manners and morals are relatively unimportant; the terrorism that the Church exerted is more to the point.

The chief instruments of coercion of which the Church disposed were excommunication and the confessional. Without confession, no absolution; and without absolution, eternal torture.

There is a quaint little anecdote about the Curé of Mendon, in which that immortal jester is represented face to face with Clement VII. His Holiness having graciously permitted him to ask a favour, Rabelais begged to be excommunicated. Exclamation-points and question-marks shot from the Pontiff's eyes. "Holy Father," said the apostate, "I am a Frenchman. I come from a little town called Chinon, where the stake is often seen. A good many fine people have been burned there : some of my relatives, among others. But if your Holiness would excommunicate me, I fancy that I would never be burned. And my reason is this. Journeying lately with the Bishop from Paris to Rome, we passed through the Tarantaises, where the cold is bitter. Having reached a hut where dwelled an old woman, we besought her to make a fire. She took a faggot and tried to light it, but did not succeed ; then she took some straw from her bed, and, being still unable to make it burn, she began cursing, and said, 'Since the faggot won't burn, it must have been excommunicated by the Pope's own jaw.'" This of course occurred after the Reformation, and relates to a man who was a notorious sceptic. It is even probable that the story is a fabrication ; but as an anecdote it is serviceable in pointing the moral of the decadence of great things. In the primitive days of the Church, excommunication amounted merely to expulsion. Those against whom it was addressed were shut out of a limited circle ; but when that circle

expanded until it circumscribed all society, the potency of excommunication was prodigious. If the anathema was launched at a king, his entire monarchy fell under the ban. When Philippe Auguste was excommunicated, neither baptism, marriage nor burial was permitted in the realm. Corpses rotted in the highways. The people became wild with terror. This state of affairs lasted for eighteen months—in fact, until the interdict was removed. But with time, as has been hinted, its potency waned; like other good things, it was overdone; and early in the fifteenth century all those who had the heart to laugh must have been hugely amused at the spectacle of three rival popes excommunicating each other.

During the dark ages, however, amusement was rare. The masses were a prey to all the delusions and depressions that come of poor nourishment. They were ignorant and credulous; their minds were filled with fables and legends; they were terrorised by the dead as well as the living; agonised in this life, they were threatened with everlasting torture in another. It is, therefore, but small wonder that they shuddered at the viaticum and trembled before the priest. It was through his ministrations alone that salvation was obtainable.

At first the priest was merely an intercessor. In return for his good offices, he asked of the penitent little else than fasting, prayer and contrition; but gradually he discovered that these

canonical penances were without advantage to himself, and he began to exact payment for the divine forgiveness which it was his privilege to declare. In the course of time, this custom was found so profitable that plenary indulgences were granted. In 1300, pilgrims from far and near flocked to Rome and covered the altars with gold. Every sin, every penalty, was remitted. The claims of purgatory were obliterated. The joy was so great, that the pilgrimage was called a jubilee.

The jubilee was instituted by Boniface VIII., the author of the bull *Ausculata fili*, in which he declared that, as representative of God, he had the right and the power to uproot, tear down, destroy, dissipate, rebuild and raise up in His name. In spite of this fine language, the Avignon Consistory established that he had asserted that the Trinity was an absurdity; that it was fatuous to believe in it; that religion was all a lie; that there was no harm in adultery; and that he, the pope, who could humble kings, was mightier than Christ.

The success of the first jubilee was so great that Urban VI. held another; only instead of summoning the pilgrims to Rome, he allowed his absolution to be hawked about wherever sinners most did congregate. It had been said that the riches of man are his redemption, and the clergy were very ready to put the saying into practice. Indulgences were not only sold, they appear to have been forced on those who refused

them. A dominican, Johan Tetzel, took charge of the sale in Germany of those granted by Leo X. He announced that he had power to deliver a full discharge from the penalties of sin, even *si quis Virginem vitiasset ac gravidam fecisset*. His tariff is still exhibited.

Meanwhile, the General Councils had moved from Constantinople to Rome. The heresies which they were called upon to consider were mainly protestations against the despotism of the Church. First came the heresies of the Petrobusians and the Arnoldists—unimportant, but vexatious; so vexatious, in fact, that their respective founders, Petrus de Brueys and Arnold de Bresse, were burned at the stake. The Petrobusians were followed by the Vaudois, who, although pursued, proscribed and anathematised, maintained a secret continuity until Calvinism offered them a harbour. Another heresy was that of the Albigenses. The Albigenses, who came from a village in Languedoc, at a time Michelet has noted, when Languedoc was a Babel, professed a mixture of Gnosticism and Manicheism. They considered the Saviour to have been a man, like any other, who had suffered the just punishment of his sins. But, what was more serious, they questioned the prerogatives of the Holy See. Innocent III. determined to exterminate them. At his commands the King of France and the Duke of Burgundy set out for Languedoc. The query was, how the heretics were to be distinguished from the ortho-



dox. "Kill them all," said Armand, the pope's legate; "kill them all; God will know His own." Sixty thousand are reported to have been killed; and of these, seven thousand were slaughtered in a cathedral that was ringing with a *Te Deum*. The whole of Provence was devastated; vines were uprooted, harvests destroyed, and houses torn down. As this seemed insufficient, the bishops received orders to visit personally or by delegate any portion of their diocese in which they suspected that heretics might lurk. When this decretal was made, the Inquisition was established. "*Et ardet*," said the pseudo St. John; and those two words were sufficient to send over half-a-million of human beings to the stake.\* Yet still heresies continued to appear. There was the heresy of the Dulcinists, the heresy of John Wicliffe, of John Huss, of Jerome of Prague. *J'en passe et des plus exquis*.

From the Crusades, in which nations wrangled over a sepulchre, sprang a new heresy, or rather an apostasy—that of the Templars, whose office it had been to protect pilgrims on their way to the East. It was claimed that, instead of attending to their duties, they had become believers in Muhammad; and, moreover, that they held Salahaddin to be a valiant and courteous knight, which he probably was. Muhammad, who had long been turned to dust, was a well-intentioned

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\* Michelet: *Histoire de France*. Llorente: *Histoire de l'Inquisition*.



visionary, afflicted with what is known to pathology as hysteria muscularis—the only disease that ever founded a religion. Now if the Templars were apostates, they at least were logical. The Papacy had pitted Christianity against Muhammadanism, and staked the authenticity of each on the result. The result was that the latter proved its claim. This point, however, does not seem to have been advanced in their favour. They were tried, convicted, and many of them were burned.

Meanwhile, the popes and princes of the Church had lost faith, and decency as well. Petrarch, in his letters *Sine titulo*, speaks of the papal court as follows :

“There is here (in Avignon) everything imaginable in the way of confusion, darkness and horror. Avignon is the sewer of every vice, the gully of every wickedness. I know from personal experience that in this place there is neither piety nor charity. Faith is absent ; there is nothing holy, nothing just, nothing human. Friendship, modesty and decency are unknown. Houses, squares, temples, courts and pontifical palaces drip with lies. The hope of a future life is considered an illusion ; Jesus Christ is looked upon as a useless invention ; virtue is regarded as a proof of stupidity, and prostitution leads to fame.”

Such is Petrarch's account ; but Petrarch was possibly annoyed because his sister had been seduced by the pope.

The Abbé Guyot, author of the "Dictionary of Heresies," says, though alluding this time to Rome: "The luxury of the bishops, their scandalous mode of life, their ignorance, which is on a par with their vices, have furnished heretics with excellent grounds for violent rhetoric."

Of Sextus IV., Infessura says, in words that are best left untranslated, "Puerum amator et sodomita fuit." And it would appear, not only that he was guilty of these charming practices, but that he granted indulgences for their general commission. Innocent VIII., his successor, by way of setting a good example to future pontiffs, made public acknowledgment of four sons and three daughters. He established an agency where the remission of sins could be bought as readily as a railway ticket to-day. Of Alexander VI., the father and lover of Lucretia Borgia, little that is favourable can be said, except perhaps that he was the most magnificent ruffian that Rome had seen since the days when Nero, with a concave emerald for monocle, watched the rape of Christian girls.

If the popes were a bad lot, the clergy do not seem to have been much better. Gerson says that the cloisters were like markets, the convents like lupanars, and that the churches and cathedrals were lairs of bandits and thieves. But the mediæval priest was not only a voluptuary and a freebooter, he appears to have been a jocular blasphemer as well. It is a part of history that when Luther reached Rome he heard more than

one of them consecrate the Eucharist with a jeer: "Panis es et panis manebis, vinum es et vinum manebis." There cannot have been two hells; and, granting that there was one, the Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church seems to have been built on it.

In the year 1500 the world was very old. The Renaissance had lied. It had promised and not fulfilled. A few years before, Savonarola had sought to reform Christianity, and particularly the pope. He was burned. In words that rise and greet and kiss the eye, Dante had rejuvenated hell. Petrarch had poured the newest of wine into a cup that was gothic. Across the centuries an unterrified spirit of beauty had called to Boccaccio, and he had repeated the message to inattentive ears. There seemed to be no one that cared to blow away the dust of ages. Every germ that promised fruit was neutralised. Yet Italy was peopled with atheists. The jurisdiction of the Orient was lost; England was no longer a vassal. A tottering pontiff anathematised in vain, and, seeing the uselessness of his maledictions, filled Europe with the uproar of his debauches. The world was very old, but in the printing-press it had found the waters of youth. The earth was larger, and soon the skies were to be unveiled.

It was in those days that a German monk threw an ink-bottle at the devil and defied the pope. A little later, Bohemia seceded. Germany followed in the wake, and with her went Switzer-

land and the Northern States. Luther's heresy became orthodoxy. And yet the newest thing about it was so old that it had been forgotten. Everywhere it was welcomed. The question of its youth or age had nothing to do with it. It was in opposition to the existing order of things, and as such it was a success. Catholicism was a twilight, Lutherism a dawn. Christ said, Prepare ; the Church said, Sleep ; the Reformation called upon the world to awake. Luther's aim was to lead belief back to the starting-point, but for the time being his aim was overlooked. The heresy which bore his name was considered merely a quarrel between monks. "Bravo!" Hutten said ; "let them eat each other up!"

Luther, who was a courageous blunderer and sincere in all his endeavours, did something more than try to change the current of affairs. He created German as Dante had created Italian. It was he who caught and tamed the ringing tongue of the Niebelungen. From the resisting heroes of the Rhine he lured a secret, and, first of his race, gave to a nation a language for birthright.

Barbarism, meanwhile, had not absorbed itself. Pyrrho still slept. The reform which Luther instituted aggravated the evils which it proposed to correct. The Protestantism which followed was as intolerant as the mother Church ; more so perhaps, for it had the intolerance of youth, and as it broke and scattered into countless creeds, each of the brood, save the Quakers, arrogated to itself the right to persecute and

destroy. To Luther, persecution seemed not only lawful but necessary. Calvin, who was as intolerant as the Inquisition and every whit as fanatical, made it a prop of his church. And Knox, to whom one mass was more frightful than ten thousand insurgents, declared that an idolater merited nothing less than death.

But persecution, however endorsed, was not of a nature to resist the influence of advancing thought. As scepticism arose, intolerance declined ; and as belief in future punishment passed away, so did the torture of the recalcitrant. It may be noted that the lamented Ranke estimates the number of human beings destroyed by Christianity as surpassing ten million. And yet there are people who think that Justice merely limps. During ten centuries it sat motionless in a cul de-jatte.

Among the first to break a lance in the Lutheran tragedy was Erasmus. No one that has read "The Cloister and the Hearth" will need to be reminded that the story of Gerard and Marguerite is the history of his parentage. As a knight-errant of free thought he went about combating intolerance. In the last pages of the ever-famous "Praise of Folly," he showed, with exquisite felicity of diction, the folly of creeds and sects. We are wiser now ; but the world then was learning the alphabet. Erasmus received his full share of abuse, and, what is more to the point, saw his enemies exhaust twenty-seven editions of his work. Unpopularity has its advantages.



In spite of his intrepidity, Erasmus was as a small boy in comparison to that *abstracteur de quinte essence*, Master Alcofrybas Nasier. Where Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio had looked into the past, the author of the exceedingly horrifying life of the Great Gargantua pointed to unexplored horizons. The "Praise of Folly" was cold as a rapier; the biography which Rabelais gave to the public was as exuberant, as prodigal and as turbulent as the sea. It was a new praise of Nature. Its appearance marked the beginning of another Renaissance; in all its pantagrueism there was not a single tear. Its philosophy was a commingling of science and satire; it was unexampled in boldness, but it was not dogmatic. Rabelais, who had been educated in a monastery, where the vows were those of ignorance and not of religion, was too wise to be an atheist. He objected mightily to tyranny, but he did not meddle with the unknowable. If he was anything, he was an agnostic. "I am going in search of the great Perhaps," he said on his death-bed. His obscenity is compromising, but it is not blasphemous. The nakedness of his thought extended only to the material.

Another thinker who refused to take a step beyond the real was Montaigne. Where Rabelais hesitated, Montaigne doubted. He had caught the Isostheneia of Pyrrho, and balanced his thought in a perfect equilibrium. He neither affirmed nor denied. If he fancied that the universe was a foundling, his good taste pre-



vented him from openly questioning the parentage. In this respect his silence is admirable and well worthy of imitation. Christianity he looked upon as a decadence. He noted with mild regret that the high-roads of civilisation were moss-grown and abandoned, and that the compass which the Greeks had used was buried under the dust of centuries. But he waived conclusions; his thought was too volatile to convey a decision. Stella said that had Swift so desired, he could have written beautifully about a broomstick. Montaigne wrote about nothing at all with a charm that has never been excelled.

When Montaigne put a question-mark, Charron shrugged his shoulders; the *Que sçay ie?* the What do-I know? became, What does it matter? And yet, like many another that affected indifference, Charron was ardent and prone to indignation. In his chief work, *De la Sagesse*, a work undeservedly forgotten, he said many smart things to the orthodox, and he said them, too, in a language which, if antiquated to-day, was then very virile. He was among the first to note that ideas of right and wrong vary with the latitude. "That which is impious, unjust and abominable in one place, is piety, justice and honour in another. There is not a law, a custom or a belief, that is everywhere received or rejected." Religion, too, he held to be a question of latitude. "Our religion is that of the country in which we are born and educated; we are circumcised and baptised, we are Jews, Muham-

madans or Christians, before we know that we are men." To which he added: "A strange thing it is that the Christian religion, which, being the only belief true and revealed of God, ought to be extremely one and united, because there is but one God and one truth, is, on the contrary, torn into many parts and divided into many conflicting sects, to such an extent even, that there is not an article of faith or point of doctrine which has not been diversely argued and agitated, and given rise to heresies and dissensions. But what makes it seem still more strange is, that in the false and bastard religions, whether Gentile, Pagan, Jewish or Muhammadan, the like divisions do not appear." And much more to the same effect; concluding that truth is intangible, religions are equally *estranges et horribles au sens commun*, and that the sovereign remedy for the ills of life is *de se prester à autrui et de ne se donner qu'à soy*.

While Charron in this manner was foreshortening Pyrrho, Sanchez, a Spaniard, was laying the foundations of agnosticism in a work entitled, *Tractus de multum nobile et prima universali Scientia, quod non scitur*—"Treatise on the very noble and extremely universal Science, to wit, that we know nothing." This contribution to literature appears to have created quite a little commotion; but, strange as it may seem, the commotion subsided, and to-day, outside the covers of a dictionary of philosophy, Sanchez, like Charron, is hard to find.

In the course of these international attacks, Rome had heard Bruno announce that the universe was a living organism whose soul was God. He was sent to the stake. Vanini had refused to discuss the immortality of the soul before he was old, rich and a German. He was burned at Toulouse. Campanella wrote a book against heresies, and was tortured at Naples seven times for his pains.

But the fangs of Romanism were being drawn. The Pope Urban VIII. had written on his brother's tomb, *Hic jacet pulvis et cinis, postea nihil*, and announced that the world governed itself. Decidedly the influence of the Church was on the wane, and yet the time was still far away when thought was to be disenthralled.

Were it not for a handful of thinkers, the seventeenth century might be catalogued among the dark ages. The intellectual fecundity which was the characteristic of the sixteenth gave way to an era which was largely one of mental stagnation. The world seemed tired of disputes, and inclined, too, to accept old beliefs unquestioned. The hand of scholasticism was still upon it. It viewed speculation with uneasy dread, and kept its anxious eyes fixed upon the past.

And yet there were a few whose instincts invited to other vistas. In Holland was Spinoza; in England, Bacon and Hobbes; in Germany, Kepler and Leibnitz; while in France was Gassendi, Bayle, but first Descartes. "Give me force and matter," he cried, "and I will refurbish

the world." Force and matter were not forthcoming, but in that magnificent boast was the accouchement of modern thought. One may even say that its layette was already prepared. A few years before, Europe had listened to Galileo recanting his heresy; but when, before the assembled prelates, the prisoner muttered, *E pur si muove*, a page of history was turned down, and across it was written, Farewell to Rome.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE DISSENT OF THE SEERS.

IN one of the forgotten plays of Laberius, a jester is represented as recommending a smug-faced companion to get a foretaste of philosophy in the latrinæ. In one sense the jester was wise in his generation and clairvoyant too. About philosophy in general, and metaphysics in particular, the impolite have always discerned a bad odour. And this not without reason. In literature there is nothing more unpleasant than an attempt to prove something; indeed, if ever a proper penal code is devised, the dietary products of logic will be declared contraband, and every ergo banished the realm. In the absence of any criterion of truth, such a word as therefore has seemingly no *raison d'être*. The sum of all the angles of a triangle may be equal to two right-angles, but however amply that fact or any other be demonstrated, it cannot lift the inquisitive beyond the limits of an experience which in itself may be erroneous. Who shall say but that in some other sphere, where perhaps there are now such commodities as square fluids and

moral substances,—who shall say but that there the sum of all the angles of a triangle may not be equal to two right-angles ; or, as Mill has suggested, who shall say but that there is a land where two and two make five? Yet, waiving such magnificent hypotheses, and granting that deductions which follow from experience are not erroneous, it must be admitted that they bring us no nearer the truth ; the essence, the reason of things is as intangible as before.

And metaphysics has yet another defect. The eternal questions, What am I? What can I know?—questions which it purports to answer—are left for all response as vague as the enveloping scholia. But the good that comes of evil is ever re-nascent, and out of the questions and answers have sprung the three foremost systems of modern anti-theistic thought. Of these, Pantheism takes the precedence, which is the due of age. Its nominal founder is Spinoza.

The life of Baruch Spinoza should be taught to every school-boy. It is not only as uninteresting as the ordinary studies of average youth, but it holds a lesson of such gentleness, modesty and abnegation of self, that in a search for a better one the whole parade of history might be reviewed in vain.

Like certain other notabilities, Spinoza was a Jew. His parents were descendants of Portuguese Israelites, who had fled from the Inquisition and unfolded their tents behind the dykes of the Netherlands. To-day, in Amsterdam, any



valet-de-place will designate the early home of the philosopher, and every valet-de-place will point to a different house. But when the sight-seer is tired into satisfaction, discrepancies are of small moment. Moreover, after exhausting his imagination on the Burgwal, any valet-de-place is competent to show the exact spot near the synagogue where a fanatic believer aimed a dagger at the thinker's heart. The aim was unsuccessful, though it rent the coat; and this coat the guide, if he is clever, will tell you that Spinoza kept ever after by way of memorabilium. But, clever or not, give him a louis and let him go. Spinoza's life is not such an one as should be listened to in the streets.

In the library at Wolfenbeütel there is a portrait of a grave, olive-skinned Hebrew, who stands in the upright idleness which is peculiar to portraits in oil. The hair falls back and over the shoulders in an expanding flood. The face is nearly oval, and the eyes are large and patient. This portrait, which is of Spinoza, was probably painted toward the close of his life. He died, it may be noted, at the age of forty-four, in the year 1677. As has been hinted, his life is without interest. If there was a tragedy in it, it was, as Mr. Wilde would say, that there was none at all. There is some mention of a little romance with the daughter of his teacher. But Spinoza was poor, and it is said that a wealthier student made diamonds of indifferent water fall in miniature cascades before the maiden's unresisting eyes.

It is possible that this legend, out of which Auerbach has weaved one of his charming tales, is not untrue. There is a quotation to the effect that Mammon can win his way where angels might despair ; and if an angel, then, *à fortiori*, a philosopher. In any event, Spinoza appears to have been jilted, which probably was the best thing that could have happened. A thinker should have everything, even to sex, in his brain.

Spinoza was educated to be a rabbi, but with increasing years he grew too big for Jewish theology and declined to visit the synagogue. It was then that some zealot tried to stab him. This argument being insufficient, the elders offered him an annual pension of a thousand florins, on condition that now and then he would appear in the synagogue and keep his opinions to himself. Spinoza was very poor, but his opinions were to him more precious than money. He refused therefore, and was excommunicated at once. The great ban, the Schammatha, was publicly pronounced upon him. For half-an-hour, to the blare of trumpets, he was cursed in the name which contains forty-two letters ; in the name of Him who said, *I am that I am and who shall be* ; in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the Tetragrammation ; in the name of the Globes, the Wheels, Mysterious Beasts and Ministering Angels ; in the name of the great Prince Michael ; in the name of Metatron, whose name is like that of his master ; in the

name of Achthariel Jah. The Seraphim and Ofanim were called upon to give mouth to the malediction. Jehovah was supplicated never to forgive his sin, to let all the curses in the Book of the Law fall upon and blot him from under the heavens. Then, as the music swooned in a shudder of brass, the candles were reversed, and through the darkness the whole congregation chanted in unison, Amen !

After that, Spinoza, being no longer a Jew, changed his name from Baruch to Benedictus, and turned his thoughts from the Kabbala to Descartes. The life he thereafter led was one of extreme simplicity. He earned his bread by polishing lenses, and expended on it but a trifle more than the traditional obolus of Epicurus. When his father died, his sisters, arguing that a heretic had no right nor title to the property of the faithful, tried to keep from him his inheritance. Spinoza, however, appealed against them, won his suit, and then gave back as free gift all the contested property except one bed, which his biographer Colerus says, *était en vérité fort bon*. A few other instances of his magnanimity might be given, and a few anecdotes of his gentleness related ; but when they were told, the reader would find himself as unacquainted with the man as before. Properly speaking, he had no biography ; his life was one of solitude ; its essence was meditation ; and the Wolfenbeütel portrait would have served its purpose better, had it represented the sombre face of one whose eyes

were lost in thought, and whose patient hand polished a concave lens.

Spinoza's fame rests principally on two works which shortly after his death were proscribed as profane, atheistic and blasphemous. These works are the *Tractatus Theologico-politicus* and the *Ethica*. The first is the key-note of rationalism, the second is the basis of modern philosophy. The rationalism of the first and the philosophy of the second stand in the closest connection. In both, Nature is shown to be an omnipotent ruler, in whose court such a parvenu as the supernatural is not received.

Spinoza's negations are three-fold. He denied the existence of an extra-mundane Deity; he denied that man is a free agent; and he denied the doctrine of final causes.

His negation of the existence of an extra-mundane Deity is not always clearly understood. The term *Deus* is strewn through his pages, and its repetition has often misled the unwary. There is, he taught, but one substance, and in this substance all things live, move and have their being. It is at once cause and effect; it is God. But the term thus used has nothing in common with the theistic idea of a Creator, who, having fashioned the world, "sits aloft and sees it go." On the contrary, God and the universe were to Spinoza one and identical; they were correlatives; the existence of the one made that of the other a logical necessity. To him the primordial entity, the *fons et origo rerum*, was God; but God was

Nature, and Nature, Substance. The three terms he used interchangeably; the former predominate in his earlier writings, the third in the *Ethics*. His reason for making use of the first is not entirely apparent, unless it be, as Dr. Martineau has suggested, that even when the sun of Israel had set, he still loved to linger in the mystical penumbra of an earlier faith. But be this as it may, and however his use of the term may be interpreted, it is tolerably clear that Spinoza, far from lowering the Deity to Nature, exalted Nature to a God. God was everywhere, and every region was filled with the Divine.

Spinoza has been frequently blamed for reading the banns over the unknowable and the known, and perhaps the blame is not altogether undeserved. But in this connection it may not be amiss to call Goethe to his rescue. And Goethe, it may be remembered, is the Spinoza of verse. "To discuss God apart from Nature," said the poet, "is both difficult and dangerous. It is as though we separated the soul from the body. We know the soul only through the medium of the body, and God only through Nature. Hence the absurdity of accusing of absurdity those who philosophically unite the world with God." Voltaire, however, took a different view, the view of an inconsequent historian who relies on his wit. Now wit is little else than the commonplace in fine clothes; and Voltaire, who treated the humdrum with the skill of a modiste, drew the threads of fancy, and worked an elaborate hemstitch:



“Alors un petit Juif, au long nez, au teint blême,  
 Pauvre, mais satisfait, pensif et retiré,  
 Esprit subtil et creux, moins lu que célébré,  
 Caché sous le manteau de Descartes son maître,  
 Marchant à pas comptés, s’approcha du grand Etre :  
 ‘Pardonnez moi,’ dit-il, ‘en lui parlant tout bas,  
 Mais je crois entre nous, que vous n’existez pas.’”

That which is called Free-will had to Spinoza a purely verbal existence. To him, the state of mind at any given moment is the effect of some definite cause, which itself is the effect of a preceding cause, and so on without end. His argument is to the point: “Imagine that a stone which has been set in motion becomes conscious, and, so far as it is able, endeavours to persist in its motion. This stone, since it is conscious of and interested in its endeavour, will believe that it is free, and that it continues in motion for no other reason than that it so wills. Now such is the freedom of man, which every one boasts of possessing, and which consists but in this, that men are aware of their own desires, and ignorant of the causes by which those desires are determined.”\*

This apt negation of free-will in man, Spinoza extended to broader spheres; and in showing that the force which moves the world acts because it exists and as it exists—that it has no alternatives, no standards of comparison of better or worse, and no appreciation of antitheses, of right or of wrong—in fact, in showing that everything

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\* Lettre 62. Traduction de Emile Saisset.



occurs in virtue and in accordance with eternal laws which could not be otherwise—arrived at the consoling deduction that he who understands that everything which happens, happens necessarily, will find nothing worthy of hatred, mockery or contempt, but rather will endeavour, so far as human power permits, to do well, and, as the phrase goes, to be of good cheer.

There is something in the foregoing theory that seems to savour of Calvinistic predestination. But it is only a savour. To the Calvinist, predestination is made endurable by the belief that everything is ordained by the highest wisdom ; while to the Pantheist, man is never the subject of fate. The laws of necessity are identical with his own nature, and it is through an understanding of them that he finds himself at peace with all the world.

Spinoza held the doctrine of Final Causes to be untenable, because inconsistent with the perfection that resides in God. His argument, which is advanced in the *Ethica*, has the charm which attaches to brevity : “ If God acts for a designed end, it must be that He desireth something which He hath not.”

Spinoza was neither an optimist nor a pessimist. He neither laughed at life nor grieved over it. It is possible that he understood it. Like many another before him, he had looked about for happiness ; and in the search he saw that such simulachres as wealth, distinction and pleasure, even to that *grande dame* whose name

is Glory, were smitten with one and the same defect. The desire for them sprang from an archaic source, the love of the transitory. But happiness to be real, he argued, should be imperishable. And where could such happiness be found?—where, indeed, save in the love of the eternal and the unending, in the love of truth, which in purifying and exalting the heart shields it from vain desires? If Spinoza had not been a geometrician, he would have been a poet.

In the *Tractatus Theologico-politicus*, Spinoza noted, with great good sense, that a plain man who does not enter upon philosophy may without harm and even with profit believe whatever he finds most edifying, provided he believes it sincerely. And it is related that his hostess, a simple-minded Lutheran, having asked him whether the religion she professed was capable of assuring her salvation, he advised her to seek no other, nor to doubt of its efficiency. "Do but good works," he said, "and endeavour so far as it is possible to lead a peaceful and virtuous life."

As Heine has well said, wherever a great mind gives utterance to its thoughts, there too is Golgotha. Spinoza was persecuted during his lifetime, and after death his works were condemned as profane, blasphemous and atheistic. And yet it is probable that few men more sincerely religious than he have ever lived and taught. His doctrine was one of abnegation of self and patient devotion to the eternal. He was in love with

the Infinite; it was Nature that fluttered his pulse; it was the Spirit of the universe that filled his heart with living springs. Nevertheless, there are to-day many warm-hearted and accomplished gentlemen whose views on Spinoza are a trifle more than two hundred years behind the age. To them he is still the blasphemer. But in all sincerity one may ask which is the more blasphemous, nay, which is the more vulgar, the mind that pictures the Deity as a jealous tyrant who keeps the world as a separate establishment, or the thinker who seeks to banish the dream that veils the part from the whole, and who shows the soul of man and of the universe to be the same?

In attempting to convey the higher view, Spinoza admittedly transcended the limits of experience. Indeed, there are contemporary free-thinkers who are ready to assert that he was sunk in the grossest superstitions. Perhaps he was; yet his superstitions were so refined, that in them there was room for nothing but the ideal.

A few years after Spinoza's death, on the 22nd day of November, 1694, François Arouet and Marie-Marguerite Daumart, his wife, caused to be baptised at the church of St. André des Arcs in Paris, a male child, who, born dying six months before, lived long enough to christen himself Voltaire.

The heart of the eighteenth century was like a *veilliebchen*. As Michelet, who dissected it,

announced, it was double. One half was Diderot, the other Voltaire ; but Rousseau was wedged between. Voltaire wished superstition abolished and the throne preserved ; Rousseau wanted the monarchy abolished and the altar upheld. Diderot sought the overthrow of both.

The united works of Diderot and Voltaire form a library of ninety volumes. But much of their labour is uncatalogued. Their ninety-first achievement is the French Revolution, their ninety-second is Modern Thought. If they are little read to-day, it is because their ideas have become common property, their daring seems less bold. Concerning Diderot, a word will be said later on ; but no conjunction of phrases is rich enough to paint Voltaire. His figure is as familiar as the moon, yet the currents of his thought are almost as intangible. Nature, who, as Malebranche has said, speaks neither Latin nor Greek nor Hebrew, had taught him the nothingness of creeds. He had but one dogma, Reason. When he preached God and liberty, the liberty was freedom of thought, and God the deification of common-sense. In his vague deism there was room for many things. "Believe in God," he said to a questioning rhymster ; "believe in God ; there is nothing more poetic." But to Madame du Deffand, in whom he confided, he admitted his acquaintanceship with a man who thoroughly believed that when a bee died it ceased to hum. That man was none other than himself. In those days there were not a few who believed as he

did. Among them was that most anti-christian of monarchs, the fat Frederick, who played badly on the flute, wrote verses that limp after him through history, but who possessed an enchanted sword, a nimble wit, and a great fund of appreciation for those whose views coincided with his own.

From this monarch there came to Voltaire an invitation requesting the pleasures of his society, and this invitation Voltaire accepted. Voltaire was never young. When he reached Berlin his hair was white, and he looked, Madame de Staël has said, like a wicked old monk come back from another world to visit this ; but such a fascinating pagan was he, that in winning him from the fifteenth Louis of France, Frederick valued the gain more highly than a province.

At the historic suppers of the king, Voltaire likened the symposiasts to the seven sages of Greece in a lupanar. "In no corner of the globe," he said, "has liberty of speech been greater, or have superstitions been treated with keener contempt." Beside Voltaire and Frederick, the usual guests were the Marquis d'Argens, Lamettrie, Maupertuis, Algarotti and d'Armand. The last-named gentlemen are relatively unimportant, but the others should not pass unnoticed.

D'Argens was not only the king's guest, he was his nearest friend, a sort of dignified Triboulet. He was a Provençal, an ex-free lance, handsome and dissipated, who after a riotous career, during which he had explored most of the side



scenes of life, made love in five languages, and fought over the better part of Europe, retired suddenly to Holland and burned the midnight oil. It was the old story of the devil turned hermit. In Holland in those days, thought was almost untrammelled. When a foreign author was afraid of the printers in his own country, he set those of the Netherlands at work, very much as the ultra-naturalists of contemporary France obtain to-day the assistance of Belgian publishers. D'Argens therefore went to the Hague, hired an apartment, shut himself up for six months, and then walked out with the *Lettres Juives* in his pockets.

The *Lettres Juives*, which are nothing if not liberal, were read and appreciated by the Crown Prince of Prussia, who at once asked d'Argens to pay him a visit. But d'Argens sent a regret. The throne was occupied by Frederick Wilhelm, and that monarch was not an agreeable person. If he took a walk, everybody took to their heels. Voltaire has given it to history that whenever he met a woman in the street, he sent her about her business: "Get thee hence, thou trull, thou trollope; thy place is at home!"—a remonstrance which was accompanied as often as not by a blow or a kick; and Voltaire adds that whenever a minister of the gospel took it into his head to view a parade, he was, if caught, treated in precisely the same manner.

D'Argens knew him by reputation, and declined his son's invitation with thanks. "To



reach Potsdam," he wrote to the prince, "I should have to pass three battalions; and as I am tall, well-built, and not altogether bad-looking, I don't dare." But when the prince became king, there was nothing to fear, and Potsdam counted another guest.

It was not long before d'Argens became the chamberlain, and, as has been hinted, the friend of the king. He was a brilliant conversationalist, epigrammatic, paradoxical, and possessed of great opulence of imagination. And Frederick, who at that time was possibly the only German in Berlin who knew how to talk, knew, too, how to appreciate that ability in another. The intimacy increased with years. When the king, overcome by public and private misfortunes, doubtful of the morrow and uncertain even of the day, reflected on the advantages which a bare bodkin can procure, d'Argens hurried to the rescue with comforting maxims. The King listened, but would have his say: "Philosophy, my dear Marquis, is an excellent remedy against the ills of the past or of the future, but it is powerless against those of the present." "And what about the impassability that Zeno taught?" "Zeno," answered the king, "was the philosopher of the gods, and I am a man." Nevertheless, he took heart again, and all thoughts of the bodkin were dismissed. But d'Argens was not always so comforting. On the eve of the battle of Rosbach, Frederick happening to remark that if he lost it he would go and practise medicine in

Venice, Triboulet steadied himself against a table and hissed, "Toujours assassin."

D'Argens and Frederick grew old together. They had disputes which made them faster friends. They played practical jokes on one another, and quarrelled noisily over trifles. The king often acted like a school-boy, and d'Argens not infrequently forgot that he was a philosopher. He remembered, however, that he was not born in Berlin. About Sans-Souci there circled at times an icy wind that made him dream of Provence. One day he asked for his passport. Frederick was vexed; he did not like to be deserted; it diminished him in his own esteem. "Bah!" he exclaimed, "what is a prince born for, unless it be to cause ingratitude?" But he gave the exeat, and d'Argens returned to his early home. Soon after he died—a convert, so it was said. When Frederick heard the rumour, he laughed; he knew d'Argens too well to believe any such gossip as that. "If he received the Last Sacrament," he said, "it is because it was given to him by main strength."

"D'Argens," said Voltaire, "has the wit of Bayle and the charm of Montaigne." The doctrine which he displayed in the *Philosophie du bon sens* is a half-hearted Pyrrhonism. He, too, saw that there was no criterion of truth, but he could not always keep his eyes on the fact. "How," he asked, "can men pretend to know the essence of things when they are ignorant of their own?" That they cannot may be readily

admitted, unless it be that they are willing to supersede judgment with faith, which proceeding is the one that d'Argens recommended. He was deeply purposeful, but he was circumspect. What he shook with one hand, he steadied with the other. When he showed the advantages of belief, he was not in a greater hurry to do anything else than to show its disadvantages. First he honeycombed it with doubt and toppled it over completely. Then he set to work and built it up anew. After which he gave it another shake, and so on indefinitely, until his ink blushed and his pen refused its office. The method employed by M. Renan is not dissimilar.

There are few lands in Europe that have been more fecund in myths than Brittany. The belief in that lost city of Is, whose spires the fishers sometimes saw, whose bells, rung by the waves, clang through the winter nights, and whose magnificence was such that for the capital of France no better name could be found than Par-Is, equal to Is—the belief in that lost city was the origin of many beautiful legends. In few other lands has the faith in the weird and the supernatural been preserved with greater simplicity. Yet through one of those paradoxes of which Nature alone holds the secret, Brittany has been as fertile of doubt as of credulity. Many of the foremost of French anti-theists claim it as their home. Between Maupertuis and Renan there is a parade of familiar names, and of these names few are more significant than that of Lamettrie.

Lamettrie appears to have been an unprincipled saint, a rake without vices. He was brilliant and whimsical, an excellent purveyor of the entremets of the imagination; and as it is the individual and not the topic that makes or unmakes conversation, the great Frederick held him in high favour. Some years before Voltaire appeared in Berlin, Lamettrie had written a book, *l'Histoire naturelle de l'âme*, which had created such a stir that he had been obliged to leave France and seek refuge in Holland. There he published another book, *l'Homme machine*, which created even a greater stir; and while he was wondering where he should hide, Frederick, who had read his writings, and who never let slip an opportunity of adding another philosopher to his collection, invited him to Berlin. "He is a victim of theologians and fools," said the monarch; "let him come here and write what he pleases. I am always sorry for a philosopher in difficulties; were I not born a prince, I would be one myself."

Lamettrie was quite willing to accord to a king the pleasures of his company, and took a seat at the royal supper-table without delay. Frederick was so charmed with him that he made him his salaried reader. "I am delighted with my acquisition," he said; "Lamettrie is as light-hearted and clever as any one can be. He is a sound physician and hates doctors; he is a materialist and not material. He says scandalous things now and then, but we weaken his Epicurean wine with the water of Pythagoras."

Like some other gentlemen of a sceptical turn, Lamettrie announced that vice and virtue were purely relative—a platitude which has been running about the book-shelves ever since books were shelved. But he added something which is worth larger attention : “Away with remorse !” he exclaimed ; “it is a weakness, an outcome of education.” And if virtue and vice are merely questions of surroundings, it is indeed difficult to view remorse otherwise than as a pre-mediæval emotion. But virtue, to say nothing of vice, is something more. According to the Buddha, virtue is the agreement of the will and the conscience, a definition which would be matchless if the will were free. Marcus Aurelius called it a living and enthusiastic sympathy with Nature ; but if the boundless immorality of Nature be conceded, as it should, the fine words of the emperor are as empty as the wind. Virtue, said one who had eyed it narrowly, virtue is a name. Perhaps. Yet virtue declines to be dismissed with a phrase ; there is a disturbing magnificence about it which routs the most skilful. In describing it, Raphael is a better lexicographer than Shakespeare, though even Raphael, for all his cunning, could not paint a temperament. And virtue is little else than a question of disposition. It may be sunned and watered by a thousand influences, it may be hedged and fortified, but in its essence it is temperamental. However great the outward success may appear, the lessons and precepts of ages will not suffice



to keep it unspotted if the inner spirit be adverse. And as with virtue, so too with vice. Standards may differ with the climate, but in each case it is the conscience that elects itself judge. It is the heart, memory aiding, that gives us a paradise or a hell. If we could hush the conscience and still the heart, we might afford to listen to Lamettrie; and perhaps in future ages, when through the progress of evolution man will lose the lobes of his ears as he has already lost his tail, when he will be as completely bald as he was once entirely hirsute, perhaps then the conscience will go the way of useless possessions; but meanwhile to declaim against it is as profitable as asking alms of statues. We are perfectly free to enjoy our remorse undisturbed.

Lamettrie admitted no other life than this, and not unnaturally-sought to make the most of the worst. His ideas are contained in a treatise on Happiness, which he prefixed to a translation of Seneca's thoughts on the same subject. "Our organs," he said, "are susceptible of sensations which render life agreeable. When the impression which a sensation conveys is brief, it is pleasure that we experience; prolonged, it is bliss; permanent, it is happiness. But in every case it is the same sensation, differing merely in intensity and duration. The absence of fear and desire is happiness in its privative state; but to possess all that one wishes—to have beauty, wit, talent, esteem, wealth, health and glory—that is a happiness which is real and perfect."



The spectacle of a eudæmonist is as charming as that of a ballerine. Both belong to the category of the Delightful. But even though one be pleased by a Taglioni, there comes a moment when the pleasure palls. Lamettrie, who was fond of adventurous flights and incursions—not perhaps to the unknowable, but to that which he might have known and did not—was wont to please his readers with the *entrechats* of a lawless imagination. As a consequence, his views, if entertaining, are valueless. The real and perfect happiness of which he speaks is a will-o'-the-wisp of fancy. The possession of all that one wishes, whether the possession is concomitant, as in fairy tales, with the wish, or obtained after years of striving, does not and never will constitute happiness. In its essence, happiness is intangible; the desire for it is insatiable; and consequently, and despite every possession, it is ever unsatisfied. There may be a happiness which is transitory and fugitive, but there is none that is permanent. To say to the contrary is to announce one of the most insolent absurdities that has ever been proclaimed in the privileged aisles of the insane. For the sake of example, let it be supposed that in some one person are united all the factors which Lamettrie mentions—beauty, wit, talent, esteem, wealth, health and glory; if these possessions are what may be termed congenital, as in the case of a poet-prince, they are taken by their possessor as a matter of course, and have never served as preservatives from

discontent ; on the other hand, if their re-union is accomplished after more or less prolonged endeavours, their possessor, in obtaining them, finds himself as poor as before ; he might be able to call the world his own, and yet not know what happiness is. The honours, the riches and glory to which he aspired, are as empty as the hands of the dead. If they are magnificent, it is only from afar. The best that can be, the best that ever has been, is in the discovery and maintenance of contentment. Its factors are two-fold—the first is health ; the second, indifference.

Lamettrie's chief titles to recognition rest on the *Histoire naturelle de l'âme* and the *Homme machine*. The first-mentioned work is an argument against the belief in the immortality of the soul. With this doctrine ancient philosophy had little to do. With the exception of Pythagoras and Plato, the thinkers of classic antiquity agreed in one particular—the soul was material. Even to Tertullian its immateriality was unestablished. "Animam nihil est," he said, "sed corpus non sit ;" and not a few of the fathers of the Church held the same opinion. The masses of course thought differently. The belief in a future life was by them unquestioned. It probably arose from the re-appearance of the dead in the dreams of the living. But in Greece, as in the Roman Empire, the life prefigured was one in which there was little charm. The neglect of funeral rites turned it into a dull and restless torture.

In this particular the observances of believers were little else than precautionary safeguards, and the *Requiescat in pace* which is to be seen on contemporary tomb-stones is but a forlorn survival of their naïve superstitions. Later, when it was taught that the soul was imperishable, not through an inherent indestructibility, but through the influence of grace divine, its materiality was still undoubted. The soul and the body were considered inseparable. There were casuists who thought otherwise, and their disputes are legendary; but their disputes occurred in an era when faith was well-nigh universal. When the distinction between the soul and the body was at last satisfactorily established—that is, to those who were interested in the establishment of a satisfactory distinction—the believer found himself turning back to Plato. The soul was represented as a resultant of the forces of the body, very much as harmony is known to be won from the strings of the lyre. Yet, as Simmias queried, when the strings are broken and the wood reduced to dust, from what shall the harmony be produced?

In the *Histoire naturelle de l'âme*, little is said on this subject. It was not Lamettrie's intention to narrate what had been thought; what he wished to do was to paint the soul's development, and he put forth his best efforts to show that that which is termed soul is but the outcome of the perfectionment and education of the senses.

In *l'Homme machine* it is again a question of

the soul, and the conclusion of course is the same. In spite of Descartes, who taught of two substances precisely as though he had seen and counted them ; in spite of Leibnitz, who spiritualised matter instead of materialising the spirit ; in spite of every one and everything to the contrary, Lamettrie, in broad paragraphs, proved to his own satisfaction that to think, to feel, to distinguish right from wrong as readily as blue from yellow, and to be but an animal, superior perhaps, but still a brute, is not a bit more contradictory than it is for a parrot or a monkey to be able to distinguish pleasure from pain.

"Man is a machine," he said, "wound up and kept running by digestion. The soul is the mainspring. Both, of course, are material. As to thought, it is as much a property of matter as is electricity, motricity, impenetrability and breadth. To query with Locke whether matter can think, is tantamount to wondering whether it can tell time. In brief, man is a machine, and throughout the universe there is but one substance diversely modified. Such," he concluded, "is my idea, or rather such is the truth. *Dispute qui voudra.*"

Another Breton who found a seat at the royal supper-table was Maupertuis. Before he found it, there had been some discussion among the erudite concerning the sphericity of the globe, and two separate expeditions were sent from France to measure different degrees of longitude. One went to Lapland, the other to Peru.

Maupertuis, who was a geometrician, was placed at the head of the Polar expedition. He set out at once for Sweden, and after sixteen months of fatiguing adventures, returned to Paris to find himself the hero of the day. But in a city like Paris, a knowledge of the meridian, however exact, is not an attainment apt to make a man ceaselessly admired ; and Maupertuis, who had taken the admiration quite seriously, and had had himself painted, mantled in fur, in the act of flattening the globe, soon found that his glory was so much vapour. Now Maupertuis was not only a geometrician, he was a philosopher, and the occupant of the Prussian throne was, as has been hinted, ever ready to add a new one to his collection ; consequently, while Maupertuis was wondering at the inconstancy of his compatriots, a note was brought to him from Frederick. "Come to Berlin," it ran. "You have taught the world the form of the earth ; you shall learn from a king how much you are appreciated."

The king at that time, however, happened to be in a battle-field ; and to the battle-field Maupertuis, with the true spirit of a courtier, directed his steps. Unfortunately for him, Frederick was obliged to retreat, and Maupertuis was taken prisoner. At first it was thought that he had been killed ; but when it was learned that he had been conducted to Vienna and there fêted at court, Voltaire took occasion to say a few smart things, and the world smiled with amusement and relief.



At Vienna, the Queen asked him what his philosophy taught him to think of two princes who wrangled over patches of a planet which he had measured. "I have no right," he answered sedately, "to be more philosophic than kings." To change the subject, her Majesty deigned to inquire whether the Queen of Sweden was not the most beautiful princess in Europe. To which Maupertuis, who was nothing if not *régence*, answered, with his best bow, "I had always thought so until now." After that, he was returned unransomed to Frederick.

At Berlin, a young Pomeranian lady fell in love with him. His conversation, it appears, was so lively, that women never suspected him of being a savant. The young Pomeranian became his bride; while he, through the king's good offices, was made President of the Berlin Academy,—a sort of Minister of Literature, much as d'Argens was Minister of the Stage. Voltaire, meanwhile, was lounging at Sans-Souci. Maupertuis had not forgotten the smart things he had said, and Voltaire was perhaps a little jealous of the favour shown to a rival. But, be this as it may, it is a part of history that no love was lost between them. When Voltaire had the king's ear, he poured into it scurrilous anecdotes about his compatriot; and when Maupertuis enjoyed a similar privilege, the tale of his grievances never tarried. "They take me for a sewer," said Frederick, with the indulgent smile of a man who has said a good thing.



Frederick sided with Maupertuis. It is possible that in some kingly fashion he, too, was jealous, though in his case the jealousy was of one whose royalty threatened at times to overshadow his own. Voltaire was irascible ; he was annoyed at the preference ; and after brooding over his discontent, he composed and published a pamphlet entitled *Docteur Akakia*.

In this trifle Maupertuis was lampooned as no one had ever been before ; his pet theories—to wit, that there is no other proof of God than an algebraic formula, and that nothing which we see is as we see it—were held up to the laughter of the world. Frederick caused the edition to be seized and burned by the headsman. Voltaire, however, was not easily circumvented. A few copies escaped the auto-da-fé and went careering over Europe. Maupertuis was for ever ridiculous, but Voltaire was still unsatisfied. He kept pricking him with his pen, until Maupertuis, outwearied with his struggle with an ogre, took to his bed and died of mortification—"between two monks," said the relentless Arouet. "What do you think of him?" he asked d'Alembert ; "he has been suffering for a long time from a repletion of pride, but I did not take him either for a hypocrite or an imbecile."

Maupertuis was one of the first of the modern thinkers that have ventured to add up the balance-sheet of pleasure and pain, and also one of the first to discover that the latter largely

exceeds the former ; indeed, so large did the excess seem, that he had no hesitation in announcing that were all that is painful in life suppressed and only the pleasurable moments counted, the duration of the happiest existence would not exceed a few hours.

He had scanned the *paysages de tristesse* as carefully as another, and the fairest vista that he saw was behind the delinquent hands of death. "Post mortem nihil est ; ipsaque mors nihil,"—After death is nothing ; death itself is naught,—said Seneca ; and Maupertuis, who agreed with him thoroughly, advocated suicide, and praised the stoics for teaching that it was a permissible remedy, and one that was most useful, against the ills of life. "If," he argued, "a man believes in a religion which offers eternal rewards to those that suffer, and which threatens with eternal punishment those that die to avoid suffering, it is not bravery on his part to commit suicide, nor is it cowardice, it is idiocy. On the other hand, a man who has no belief in a future life, and who is solely occupied in making this one as little unpleasant as possible, sees neither rhyme nor reason in submitting to misfortunes from which he can free himself in a trice." Nevertheless, Maupertuis died a natural death, and, as Voltaire said, between two monks at that.

Maupertuis, Lamettrie, d'Argens, even to the philosopher king himself, were dominated and overshadowed by Voltaire. Though purposeful, their influence was slight ; it had barely strength

enough to cross the Rhine. But on the other side of that muddy river there was then a group of thinkers whose influence can be felt in some of the currents of contemporary thought, and concerning whom a word or two may now be said.

When the foremost of England's sceptics, David Hume, visited Paris, he found a warm welcome at the house of the Baron d'Holbach. It was there, Burton says, that professing he had never met an atheist, Hume was told that he was in the company of seventeen. Of these, the more noteworthy were Diderot, d'Alembert, Nageon and the host.

The Baron d'Holbach was a German who had been educated in France. He was a man of large wealth, wise, liberal and charitable. His house in the Rue Royale, which was called the Café de l'Europe, was a free academy of the freest thinkers; and of free-thinkers, domiciled and transient, d'Holbach was known as the *maître d'hôtel*. But d'Holbach was something more; he was one of the field-m Marshals of the little army of materialists who were the forerunners of the Revolution, and a lord in the literature of anti-theism. His erudition is said to have been practically unbounded. There was nothing of value written or suggested with which he was unfamiliar. "No matter what system I may imagine," said Diderot, "I am always sure that my friend d'Holbach can find me with facts and authorities to support it."

The doctrine which d'Holbach advocated was as liberal as the sea. It was a doctrine of freedom in all things—in speech, in thought, in politics and in religion. Its tenets are displayed at length in the *Système de la Nature*, a work published in Holland, and, through a literary trickery then not infrequent, attributed to a gentleman who, being dead, could not be prosecuted.

"Lost at nightfall in a forest, I have," said Diderot, "but a feeble light to guide me. A stranger happens along: 'Blow out your candle,' he says, 'and you will see your way the better.' That stranger is a theologian."

This squib might have served as epigraph to the *Système de la Nature*.

"Man," said d'Holbach, "is miserable, simply because he is ignorant. His mind is so infected with prejudices, that one might think him for ever condemned to err. . . . It is error that has forged the chains with which tyrants and priests have manacled nations. . . . It is error that has evoked the religious fears which shrivel up men with fright, or make them butcher each other for chimeras. The hatreds, persecutions, massacres and tragedies of which, under pretext of the interests of Heaven, the earth has been the repeated theatre, are one and all the outcome of error."

These bold words were the prelude to the frankest exposition of anti-theism that France had ever read. Its audacity terrified, but its austerity repelled. Its paragraphs were as Cim-

merian to the chamber-maids and hair-dressers of Paris, as the gaieties of Lamettrie had been shocking to the pedantry of Berlin. Then, too, it was rich and elaborate in its materialism. To-day it seems a trifle antiquated ; the world has thought more deeply since ; but with its general outlines contemporary thinkers have had no fault to find. In these outlines Nature is represented as the one-in-all, beyond which is nothing. The main propositions tend to show that throughout the length and breadth of space there is merely force and matter, the infinite interconnection of cause and effect ; and that it is through an ignorance of natural laws that divinities have been imagined and made the objects of hope and fear.

On the subject of hope and fear, d'Holbach had much to say. The gist of it may be summarised in the fatalist axiom, Whatever will be, is. Everything that happens, happens necessarily, and in virtue of immutable laws. As to order or disorder, they are empty terms ; like time and space, they belong to the categories of thought ; there is nothing outside of us which corresponds to them. It is all very well for man to see order in that which is in conformity with his state of being, and disorder in that which is contrary to it ; to call one the effect of an Intelligence acting toward a determined end, and the other the play of hazard. But order and disorder are but words used to designate certain states and conditions of being, which if perma-



nent are called after the one, and if transitory after the other. Beside, Nature can have no aim, for there is nothing beyond it to which it can strive. As to hazard, it is meaningless, save in contradistinction to that Intelligence which man himself has conceived. Now man, d'Holbach explains, has always fancied himself the central fact in the universe. He has connected with himself everything that he has seen, and modelled everything after his own image. In this way he grew to believe that the universe is governed by an intelligence like unto his own; yet, being at the same time convinced of his individual incapacity to cause the multiform effects of which he stood a witness, he was forced to distinguish between himself and the invisible producer, and he thought to overcome the difficulty by attributing to that intelligence an aggrandisement of the prowess which he himself possessed.

The belief in the supernatural, which in man is inherent, d'Holbach regarded as a disease to which humanity's greatest misfortunes are attributable. Truth, he was fond of saying, can never harm. Nor can it. But that does not make it a welcome guest. The whole history of religion goes to prove that man would rather be wrong in his beliefs than have none at all. Then, too, the majority have never been provided with such leisure as would enable them to dispense with illusions. The thinker may wave them away, but his gesture leaves the masses unaf-



fectured. Perhaps if the world were merely learned, it would be anti-theistic; but fortunately, or unfortunately, as the actual status of affairs may be viewed, it is something more or something less; there is an unstillable longing, an unconquerable expectation of better things, which so exalts the heart, that the serenest of atheists can never witness its effects without experiencing some sudden pang of envy.

In the polite society in which d'Holbach moved, disbelief was so prevalent that it is possible he had no occasion to experience a twinge. And if he did, the emotion has been unrecorded. He was squarely opposed to the idea of God, and at the same time a living contradiction to the theory that an atheist is necessarily a man of lax principles. Wolmar, in the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, is the portrait which Rousseau took of him. Yet, as has been already intimated, it is the temperament, and not the point of view, that guides us into paths that are those of virtue or its opposite. And it was d'Holbach's temperament that made him shame the Jew devil as Satan had never been shamed before. On this point the testimony of his contemporaries is unanimous. The purity of his life, and that, too, in a century when immorality was less a vice than a grace, has never been questioned. He was a simple-mannered gentleman, warm of heart, sweet-tempered, endowed with great delicacy of sentiment, and possessed of such tact that even Rousseau, who would have quarrelled

with an archangel, was unable to find in him any other cause of grievance than his wealth. "He is too rich for me," he said; but he added, "He is a better man, and one more really charitable, than many a Christian. *He does good without the hope of reward.*"

The only immortality in which d'Holbach believed was fame. In life there is certainly nothing more exquisite. As Schopenhauer said, it is the Golden Fleece of the elect. But after death, and true glory comes but then, fame and ignominy are to the recipient equally unmeaning. And even were it otherwise, when it is remembered what are the limitations of fame, and when it is considered how small a value can be accorded to public opinion, the immortality in which d'Holbach believed does not seem worth an effort.

D'Holbach was one of the few writers that have had the courage to advocate suicide, and he advocated it as boldly to those who cowered at death, as he advocated virtue to a century whose vice is historic. His main argument in its favour is to the effect that the engagements between man and Nature are neither voluntary on the part of the one nor reciprocal on the part of the other. Man is therefore in nowise bound; and should he find himself unsupported, he can desert a position which has become unpleasant and irksome. As to the citizen, he can hold to his country and associates only by the mortgage on his well-being. If the lien is paid

off, he is free. "Would a man be blamed," he asks, "a man who, finding himself useless and without resources in his native place, should withdraw into solitude? Well, then, with what right can a man be blamed who kills himself from despair? And what is death but an isolation?"

Maxims such as these are considered dangerous and provocative. But maxims have never caused a suicide. A man may cut his throat or hang himself to put an end to the agonies of grief or boredom, but not because he has happened on a suggestive quotation. He will look for the great quietus if he wants to, but not because it is recommended. In any case the contempt of death is a useful possession; and it is well for every one to understand that while virtue and happiness are supposed to go hand-in-hand, and that to do good is to receive it, yet after the loss of any one of us the world will go on in quite the same manner as before.

In the days when d'Holbach was giving dinner-parties in the Rue Royale, the flag of France was noticeably black. Some said that it was from the dye of the cassock; others, that it had caught the grime of mediæval institutions. At d'Holbach's dinner-table, however, in the salons of Madame Geoffrin—she who was so plain that Greuze exclaimed, "My God, if she annoys me I'll paint her!"—in the salons of Mesdames du Deffand, de Lespinasse and Necker, there assembled from time to time a handful of thinkers

who were determined to give the flag of France another hue. These gentlemen were resolute and aggressive. The century, they saw, was hungry for ideas, and it was in an effort to give it food of the right quality that the *Encyclopædia* was produced.

The *Encyclopædia*—a name coined by Rabelais—displayed the genealogy of thought. It was at once a storehouse of knowledge, an attack on ignorance, an appeal to common-sense, and a plea for liberty. It opposed every abuse, political, theological, ecclesiastical, industrial, fiscal, legal and penal. It sought to establish toleration, to abolish sacerdotal thaumaturgy, to banish the supernatural, and thwart the subornation of the understanding. It was in no sense free from error, and its erudition presents to-day a most mildewed appearance ; but it served its purpose, and from out its wide bindings burst the torrents of the Revolution.

In its opposition to everything that savoured of the illiberal, the *Encyclopædia* encountered many an obstacle and not a few embarrassments ; indeed, the history of the government and literature of the third quarter of the last century is interwoven with that of its vicissitudes and final triumph. Every man of brains wrote for it, and those who had none and wanted some subscribed. The responsibility of its publication was assumed by Diderot and d'Alembert.

Diderot was a giant, whose head was in the clouds and whose feet were in the mud. He

wrote obscene stories and anticipated Lamark, Darwin's precursor. History, art, science and philosophy he held in fee, and yet he was not erudite. He had drunk oft, not deep. "I know a great many things," he said, "but there is hardly a man that does not know some one thing better than I." In the activity of his mind may be found the reason of the admiration of his contemporaries and that of posterity's neglect. He has left us twenty volumes of essays and digressions, but not a single book. Yet no one was ever so prodigal with his pen as he. He gave it to any one that asked, to an enemy as readily as to a friend. Grimm asked his opinion on an exhibition of paintings; he gave it in an in-octavo. "I have written a satire against you," said a young man to him one day. "I am poor; will you buy it?" "Ah! sir," he exclaimed, "what a pitiable vocation is yours! but," he continued, "I will tell you what to do. The Duke of Orleans honours me with his dislike; dedicate your book to him; he will pay you well." "A good dedication is a difficult job," said the young black-mailer. "Well, sit down," Diderot answered, "and I will write it for you." And he did, and the youth received his pay.

Diderot being without ambition was known as the Philosopher, but he was so poor that he could hardly buy the cloak. When he wished to dower his daughter, he found that he had nothing except his library, and his library to him was life itself. Nevertheless, he determined to sell



it. Catharine of Russia learned of the determination and bought the library; but with a true sense of what is royal, she left him the use of his books and made him their salaried custodian beside.

At the beginning of his literary career, Diderot was a sincere deist, which, as some one has said, is a proof of what education may do. It was not long, however, before he saw that scepticism is the first step to philosophy; and when the step was taken, he descended without a compunction the precipitate stair of negation. The stages of his thought are well defined. "Aggrandise God," he shouted in his first enthusiasm; "free Him from the captivity of temples and creeds. See Him everywhere, or say that He does not exist." Later—in the "Letter on the Blind for the Use of those who See"—he manifested a classic indifference on the whole subject. "Ask an Indian how the world is suspended in the air, and he will tell you that it rests on the back of an elephant. 'And the elephant?' 'On a turtle.' You pity the Indian, yet one might say to you as to him, 'Admit your ignorance, and don't bother me with a menagerie.'"

But his indifference was transient. "Among the difficulties (of believing in God), there is one," he noted, "which has been agitated since the world began. It is that men suffer without having deserved to do so. To this there has never been an answer. The existence of a Supreme Being is incompatible with evils, moral



and physical. What, then, is the safest course? The one which we have taken. Whatever the optimists may say, we answer that if the world could not exist without sentient beings, and sentient beings without pain, the Almighty would have done better to keep quiet." Thereafter he became firmly anti-theistic. "It is," he said, "highly important not to mistake hemlock for parsley, but it is entirely unnecessary to believe in God." "The Christian religion," he added, "is atrocious in its dogmas. It is unintelligible, metaphysical, intertwined and obscure. It is mischievous to tranquillity, dangerous in its discipline, puerile and unsociable in its ethics, and in its ceremonial dreary, flat, Gothic and most gloomy. . . . If my ideas please no one," he concluded, "it is possible that they are poor; but if they pleased everybody, I would consider them detestable." Yet as he preached tolerance, he practised it, and was never known to refuse a crutch to those who had no legs.

Among the Encyclopædists, where Diderot was king, d'Alembert was prime minister, a Mazarin, as one may say; but a Mazarin who grew faint-hearted, and, fearing the Bastille, left his monarch in the lurch.

D'Alembert was more a mathematician than a philosopher. His mistress was Algebra. History has given the same title to Mlle. de l'Espinasse; but if he was unfaithful, the lady in question appears to have paid him back in a better coin than his own. He was not a cheerful

person, yet when alone with his books he was happy as though he were dead. "Qui est-ce qui est heureux?" some one asked him. "Quelque misérable," he replied. He was an invalid, too; but he hated medicine, and held a physician to be like a blind man who armed with a cudgel strikes at random, and, according as he strikes, annihilates the disease or—the patient.

As has been hinted, he was timid, or perhaps merely cautious, a trait which found little favour with Voltaire. "Philosophers are too lukewarm," he said; "instead of shrugging their shoulders at the errors of mankind, they ought to wipe them out." But apparently d'Alembert did not agree with him. "Philosophers," he retorted, "should be like children, who, when they have done anything wrong, put the blame on the cat." But if for one reason or another he thought it best to keep his views from the public, he had no hesitation in whispering them to the sympathetic ear of Frederick the Great. The latter had written what he called a refutation of the naturalism conveyed in d'Holbach's *Système de la Nature*. The book had annoyed him; but what probably annoyed him most was, not its naturalism, but its attack on the sacred caste of royalty. At the same time, as he himself said, if d'Holbach were condemned to be burned, he would be the first to play the hose on the stake.

In the eyes of the liberal monarch, d'Alembert, when answering the refutation, brandished the historic doubt. "Montaigne's motto, What do

I know? seems to me," he wrote, "the answer that should be made to all questions in metaphysics. . . . Those who deny the existence of a Supreme Intelligence advance more than they can prove. In treating such a subject, scepticism is the only reasonable standpoint. No one, for instance, can deny that throughout the universe, and particularly in the formation of plants and animals, there are combinations which seem to reveal an Intelligence. That they prove it, as a watch proves a watch-maker, is incontestable. But supposing that one wishing to go further asks, What is this Intelligence? Did it create, or did it merely arrange matter? Is creation possible, or, if it be not, is matter eternal? And if matter is eternal and needed an Intelligence simply to arrange it, is that Intelligence united to matter, or is it distinct? If it is united, matter, properly speaking, is God, and God is matter. If it is distinct, how can that which is material be fashioned by that which is not? Besides, if this Intelligence is infinitely wise and infinitely powerful, why is the world, which is its work, so filled with physical and moral imperfections? Why are not all men happy? Why are not all men just? Your Majesty assures me that this question is answered by the world's eternity. And so perhaps it is, but seemingly merely in this sense, that the world being eternal, and in consequence necessary, everything which is, must be as it is; and at once we enter into a system of fatality and necessity which does not in the least

accord with the idea of a God infinitely wise and infinitely powerful. Sire, when these questions arise, we should repeat 'Que sais-je?' an hundred times. Then, too, there is a consolation for ignorance in the thought that, as we know nothing, it is unnecessary for us to know more."

To which Frederick, who gave a nickname as readily as a pension, answered :

"But, my dear Diagoras, if you fancy that I can give a detailed explanation of the Intelligence that I marry to Nature, you over-estimate my ability. I can say merely that I perceive it as I would an object of which I might happen to catch a glimpse through a mist."

D'Alembert, however, was not to be played with, and he returned to the charge and routed the fat king with a fresh arsenal of queries.

"With the exception of the animal kingdom, the realms of matter with which we are acquainted appear deprived of sentiency, volition and thought. Is it possible that intelligence resides in them without our knowledge? Of this there is no evidence, and I am inclined to think that the block of marble, as well as the plants that are the most delicately and ingeniously organised, are without thought and feeling. But, it is objected, the organisation of these bodies discloses visible traces of an intelligence. This I do not deny; but I would be glad to know what has become of this intelligence since these bodies were organised. If it resided within them while they were being formed and in order to form

them, and if, as it is supposed, this intelligence is not distinct from them, what has become of it since its work is done? Has the very perfection of the organisation been annihilated? To me, such a supposition seems untenable. If, then, the intelligence whose effects we admire in man is merely a resultant of organisation, why, in other realms of matter, may we not admit a structure and an arrangement as necessary and as natural as matter itself, and from which, without the intervention of any intelligence, would result the very effects which surround and surprise us? Lastly, in admitting the doctrine that an Intelligence presided over the formation of the world and still watches over its well-being, it is hard to reconcile the theory of that Intelligence with the idea of infinite wisdom and power. For, to the misfortune of humanity, this world of ours is very far from being the best one possible. With the best of intentions, we are therefore unable to recognise any other God than one who, at most, is material, limited and dependent. I do not know whether this view is the correct one, but certainly it is not that of the Deity's partisans, who would much prefer to have us atheists than the Spinozists that we are. To mollify them, let us turn sceptic and repeat with Montaigne, *Que sais-je?*"

This amiable agnosticism was shared by few of the Encyclopædists. To Naigeon, who would have nothing to do with half-way measures, it seemed little less than revolting. Naigeon was



a Puritan without beliefs ; his atheism was as fervent as his life was austere. When he first sat, a stripling, at d'Holbach's table, he was largely ridiculed. He was a pretty boy, with fair skin and curled blonde hair. Diderot's monkey, La Harpe called him, for it was through Diderot that he was brought into notice. But with age the comely lad developed into a tiger. To him Diderot left the care of his unpublished manuscripts, and these Naigeon edited, together with the memoirs of the author. He, too, was a voluminous writer, and scattered essays and treatises with a prodigality which he had caught from his master. But the work which caused the greatest number of people to turn about and look after him in the street was the *Theologie portative*. In it the beliefs and tenets of Christendom were treated in a manner that reminds one of Col. Ingersoll. In the subsequent *Encyclopédie méthodique* he wrote again on these and adjacent subjects, though this time from a broader and more serious standpoint.

Politically, socially and morally untrammelled, he had, meanwhile, been keeping a finger on the public pulse, and he felt that some great, if undetermined, change was at hand. So soon, then, as the National Assembly got to work on its declaration of the rights of man, Naigeon issued an address, in which he prayed the Assembly to banish from the proclamation any suggestion of religion, and in its place to assert man's right to entire freedom of thought and speech. But the



petition was unnoticed. It is possible that he made a second appeal to Robespierre ; but if he did, it was as unsuccessful as the first. And there is an anecdote that one day during the Terror he looked so much alarmed, that some asked him if he were on the list of the condemned. "Worse than that," he cried. "That monster Robespierre has decreed the existence of a Supreme Being !" To Robespierre, an atheist was an aristocrat.

While Naigeon was addressing the Assembly, a young man named Sylvain Maréchal passed out of Saint-Lazare. A few months previous, he had published a little book entitled, *l'Almanach des honnêtes gens*, in which wise men were given precedence over saints. This disregard of etiquette procured for Maréchal an opportunity to meditate on the proprieties of life. When the prison-doors were opened, he passed his time in succouring the indigent and housing the pursued. He fed and sheltered priests and royalists alike, and even paid masses for the repose of the soul of an old woman because he knew that such had been her wish.

Yet Maréchal was one of the fanatics of atheism, and as proud of negation as though he had invented it. The devil, one may see, is rarely as red as he appears on the stage. The thinkers with whom this chapter has had to deal were fervent in their disbelief ; but in their disbelief there was room for such charity, tolerance and broad good-will, that one looks in vain for a

stone that shall hit them. Perhaps, as some one has said, it is only the just that have a right to be atheists. And yet they were not impeccable; with one exception, they were guilty of a grievous sin against good manners—they were dogmatic. One may fancy that their voices were seldom modulated; it is probable that they shouted, and there are few among us that care to be shouted at. Then, too, there was a confidence and an assurance in their atheism which is as unpleasant as bigotry. They forgot Montaigne, and they let Pyrrho fall asleep. Maréchal was not better than the others; one may even say that he was worse, for he was dogmatic in rhyme. Since Lucretius, atheism had been without a poet. Leopardi's father was then a bachelor, and Shelley was in the cradle. It was Maréchal that the irreverent Muse first ordered to hold the lute. And Maréchal kissed the Muse full upon the mouth, and sang loudly in a strain of boyish bravado. Whether or not Maréchal's notes were listened to, is relatively a matter of small importance. A little later, the Being whose existence Robespierre had decreed was publicly deposed. The cathedral of Notre-Dame was consecrated to the worship of Reason, the crosier and the ring were trampled under foot, and an ass, crowned with a mitre, was led through exulting crowds.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE PROTESTS OF YESTERDAY.

THE lives of philosophers are dull. Descartes might figure as the hero of a romance, but Descartes is an exception. Fichte belongs to the rule. The story of his manhood is one of poverty which is not poignant, and of successes which were not great.

In a work on this thinker, Professor Adamson notes one fact which is palpitant in truth and lucidity ; it is to the effect that Europe to-day does not hold ten students of that marvellous sophist. And yet Fichte is one of the most insolent of dissenters. To the ordinary reader his negations are inexplicable ; they comprise the denial of the reality of the external world. This denial, which is known as akosmism, is pantheism's twin-sister. Pantheism admits no other reality than Nature ; and akosmism, taking one step further, declines to admit any reality at all. Of the two, pantheism has been the more fruitful. It began with the Vedas ; ran through Eleatic and Neo-platonic philosophy ; was caught up by Scott Erigena and handed to Bruno, who

passed it to Spinoza. Another thread or two runs through the Talmud, the Kabbala, the theories of Maimonides, Gerson and Chesdai Creskas ; and there are tangles of it in the beliefs of mediæval communities, in the heresies of the Beghards and Beguines, the Turlupins and Adamites; but with their unravelment the reader need not be wearied. Akosmism has found fewer adherents. Like pantheism, it began with the Vedas, or, more correctly, with the Vedanta philosophy; left broad traces in Greece; revived for a moment during the Renaissance ; and then sank back into obscurity until Fichte, Kant aiding, brought it to light anew. Between the two systems there is this cardinal distinction. Pantheism and science have never been other than the best of friends. There is nothing in the one that has ever been seriously opposed by the other. But akosmism and science look at each other askant. They have as much in common as have the poet and the mathematician.

The clearest idea of Fichte's akosmism, or rather the clearest idea of its charm and futility, is conveyed in a work entitled the *Bestimmung des Menschen*, the Vocation of Man. The work is divided into three parts: Doubt, Knowledge and Faith. The first part, Doubt, opens with an inquiry concerning that mystery within us that calls itself "I," and an examination of Nature that vaunts itself real. From this inquiry and from this examination, Fichte discovers that man is but a link in a chain of necessity, a part

of that force which, amid the everlasting revolution and mutation of things, is the sum and substance of all that is.

And that chain of necessity ! Was there ever anything more delicately interconnected ? One has but to look at it to see that its rivets are so tight that they make it impossible for anything to be other than it is. Take, for instance, a single grain of sand on the sea-shore, and fancy that it lies a few feet further inland than it actually does. The mental operation is, admittedly, most easy to perform ; but note the consequences. For that grain of sand to be a few feet further inland, then must the wind which bore it have been stronger than it was ; then must the state of the atmosphere which occasioned the wind have been different from what it was, and the previous changes different ; in fact, it is necessary to presuppose an entirely different temperature from that which actually existed. We must also suppose a different constitution of the bodies which influenced the temperature, the barrenness or fertility of countries, on which depend the health of man and the duration of life. Interfere, therefore, with that grain of sand, and it is within the range of possibilities that in such a state of weather as was necessary to move it but a few feet further inland, some one, long ago, may have died of cold or hunger—long ago, before the birth of that son from whom the sophist himself descended ; and behold, Fichte would have been spared the trials



of life, and prevented, too, from solving every problem, and leaving the student nothing to do but to bore himself to death.

From Fichte's logic, therefore, the necessity which compels everything to be precisely as it is, is amply demonstrated. Nevertheless, doubt is not yet banished. It is true he has proved the existence of man to be but a manifestation of a force whose operation is determined by the whole of the universe, but into the nature of that force he is unable to look. And even could he, of what use would it be? It would not help him to regulate his actions. Nature is the last one to contradict herself, and she allows no one to contradict her. The force that acts on us and in us makes us what we are ; and to attempt to make ourselves otherwise than it has been appointed we should be, is a task which may be pleasant, but which assuredly is useless. In the chain of necessity we are all interlinked : fight free who may. They who have done so have reached that bourne from which no traveller returns.

We may rejoice and repent, we may form good resolutions ; but the joy and the repentance and the good resolutions come to us of themselves, and not until it is appointed that they shall do so. When they do come, however sincere the repentance may be, however magnificent the resolutions, the course of things moves on unchanged and changeless as before. We lie in the lap of necessity. Should Nature destine one



man to be wise and to be brave, wise and brave he will be. Should she destine another to be scatterbrained and imbecile, scatterbrained and imbecile will he become. There is no merit, no blame, to be ascribed to her or to them. The wishes that throb in our hearts may rebel, but the great Mother snuffs them out like a candle. She is governed herself. Her laws are ours.

It is in musings of this description that Fichte stretches his hand to Spinoza and denies that man is a free agent. At best he is a conscious automaton. But what if he were not even that? Is there any one thing of which he is certain?

"Dreams are true while they last, and do we not live in dreams?"

Fichte asks himself the same question, and looking with introspective eye for an answer, discovers the purely subjective character of all human knowledge. He sees that he has no consciousness of things in themselves, only a consciousness of a consciousness of them. Were he blind, what would he know of colour? Were he deaf, what would he know of song? Were he without imagination, doubt, hope and fear would have no meaning. Such knowledge as man possesses is merely a knowledge of himself; beyond it, consciousness never goes. When it seems to do otherwise, when man assumes to be conscious of an object—the sun, for instance—he has merely the consciousness of a supposition of an object, which supposition he identifies with sensation and takes for the object itself.

It has been hinted that akosmism and science are at odds, but on this point they agree. As a matter of fact, and one admitted by all decorous scholars, we none of us see the sun. What we do see are certain modifications of light in immediate relation to our organ of vision. And in this connection it is not improper to note that no two persons see the same modifications of the same light, and that for the reason that each person sees a different complement of rays acting on his own individual retina.

But to return to Fichte, and to put his idea less technically, it is a self-evident proposition that we neither see our sight, feel our touch, nor yet have a higher sense by which things affecting the organs of sense are perceived. It is therefore not difficult to accept the axiom that our consciousness of external existence is merely the product of our presentative faculty. The difficulty lies in the application, for with it all reality vanishes. "In that which we call intuitive knowledge, we contemplate only ourselves, and our consciousness is and can be only a consciousness of the modifications of our own existence. If, therefore, the external world arises before us only through our own consciousness, it follows that what is particular and multiform in the external world can arise in no other way; and if the connection between ourselves and what is external to us is simply a connection of thought, then is the connection of the multifarious objects of the external world simply this and no other."

The whole of the material world is, then, but a cerebral phenomenon. There is no being, no real existence. The only things that exist are pictures, and these pictures know themselves after the fashion of pictures. They are pictures which float past, without there being anything past which they float,—pictures which picture nothing, images without significance and without an aim. Reality is a dream, without a world of which the dream might be, or a mind that might dream it. It is a dream which is woven together in a dream of itself. Intuition is the dream; thought, the source of fancied reality, is the dream of that dream.

In this charming manner, Fichte, after divesting himself of doubt and attaining perfect knowledge, mounts into a higher sphere which he terms Faith. Into the austerities of this abstraction it is unnecessary to follow him; and it will perhaps suffice to note that the conclusion amounts to the assertion that where the canaille believe that things are as they appear, because they must, the philosopher believes because he will. After a deduction such as that, one may well exclaim against the uselessness of philosophy in general, and the Fichtean branch in particular.

Fichte's metaphysical hysterics excited the wildest hilarity. His formula  $I = I$ , on which in an earlier work he had sounded all the changes, was popularly supposed to mean his own individual ego. Fichte, however, meant nothing of the sort. The "I" he used in the impersonal

sense which is conveyed in such expressions as "it rains," "it snows." The "I" represented the force that pervades all things, and which in man arrives at a consciousness of self. But Fichte was not a clear writer—few Germans are; and if he was taken *au pied de la lettre*, the fault was his own. In any event, his philosophy was largely ridiculed. Heine is witness to the fact that a cartoon was circulated which represented a goose whose liver had become so big that the bird was undecided whether she was all goose or all liver. Across her Fichtean breast ran the legend  $I = I$ . The reality of his idealism, however, was not taken so easily. The Philistines waxed wroth. Heine represents a burgo-master as exclaiming, "That man thinks I don't exist, does he? Why I'm stouter than he and his superior too!" The ladies asked, "Doesn't he at least believe in the existence of his wife?" "Of course not." "And does Madame Fichte permit that?"

But with whatever facetiousness the matter may be viewed, the question of an external world has been, and is still, one of the great battle-fields of metaphysics. The realists clamour that their opponents are colossal in their errors; the idealists answer, "Tu quoque." Among the latter, few have been more vehement than Fichte. He defended his belief with all the heavy artillery of the German dictionary, and entrenched himself with logic. It was, however, merely on speculative principles that he contended that

our knowledge of mind and matter is only a consciousness of what Sir William Hamilton has christened "various bundles of baseless appearances." He did not deny the veracity of consciousness; he denied the veracity of its testimony, a distinction as subtle as it is valid. For all practical purposes the material world—including Madame Fichte—was to him not only thoroughly real, but it went spinning through space at the rate of nineteen miles a second. And it was merely the certainty of uncertainty, the haunting conviction of the unreliability of the perceptions which in earlier days led Socrates to maintain that the only thing he knew was that he knew nothing, which caused Fichte to discriminate between what he believed and what he saw.

But however unreal the world might be in theory, he was quite sure that for every-day purposes it was the worst one possible. Indeed, Fichte was not only an akosmist, he was a pessimist too, a combination which seemed so alluring to Lammenais, that after a debauch in Fichteana he was pleased to describe the world as a shadow of that which is not, an echoless sound from nowhere, the chuckle of Satan in chaos.

Fichte's successor was Schelling. In place of the abstractions of his precursor, this gentleman presented an adventurous mysticism. Both were idealists; but where the one extracted the real from the ideal, the other reversed the proceeding. The transcendentalism which they professed in



common, is the history of consciousness to the highest degree of its development. Fichte tiara'd his system with faith ; Schelling crowned his own with æsthetics. To the latter, the universe was a poem whose strophies were writ in metaphysical formulas, a phrase which may be taken to mean that he was exquisitely alive to the beauties of Nature and yet unable to picture them in readable prose. His real master was Spinoza, and his philosophy in consequence presents some of the serenest forms of pantheistic belief.

The harmony to which he was alive prefigured to him the agency of a supreme Principle ; of a Being eternally unconscious ; veiled from the sight of man by the purity of enveloping light, and apprehensible only through intellectual intuition. On the skirts of this intuition he suspended knowledge. Above it he poised art—"the revelation of that Absolute in which subject and object coincide ; in which the conscious and the unconscious unite."

"That which we call Nature," he said, "is a poem writ in mysterious hieroglyphics, but in which, were they decipherable, whoso lists might read the Odyssey of the Spirit, preyed upon by illusion, ever seeking, ever fleeing itself. . . . Nature is to the artist that which it is to the philosopher ; the ideal world ceaselessly appearing in finite forms ; the wan reflection of a universe which does not stretch beyond the mind, but rests within it."

The fundamental idea of the entire system



amounts in brief to this : earth, sea and sky, and all that in them is, are, in their essence, emanations, or, as Leibnitz has it, fulgurations of an eternal and unconscious activity. Detached from the primordial matrix, these manifestations, though interconnected, are without permanent reality. The finite world is an illusion. The infinite alone exists.

This idea, while not unalluring, is passably vague. But vagueness has no terrors for those who wish to be mystified, and that there were many such is evident from contemporary accounts of the enthusiasm with which it was greeted. The enthusiasm, however, was as impermanent as Schelling's own reality. His disciples flocked to a rival teacher, to Hegel, whose name has the sound of a knell.

The doctrine which this gentleman advanced, and which to-day is to be sought for in seventeen massive in-octavos, may be regarded as the apotheosis of the *arrière-pensée*. Hegel was the chameleon of philosophy. He believed in nothing ; and not only did he believe in nothing, but he possessed no fixity of disbelief. Whenever it is possible to pin him down, it is always on a contradiction that the pinning is accomplished. He was an anatomist of thought, a midwife of paradox. No phase, no flutter of consciousness, escaped his diagnostic. He analysed and dissected, but he did not build, or at least only on negations. He created doubts, not convictions. He made disbelievers, not

converts. It was he who should have said, "Ich bin der Geist der stets verneint."

It may be noted, parenthetically, that the proposition of which Plato caught a glimpse, and which Descartes dimly perceived, the proposition that man is the one centre of thought, formed the sum and substance of Kant's teaching. "Look," he admonished the reader, "look at time and at space. They are but categories of thought. Time is not, nor yet is space. They are appearances which the mind creates, and with which we envelop the universe." This idealism, which in Kant was partial, in Fichte subjective, and in Schelling objective, became absolute with Hegel. To him, illusion was the one permanency, the one cause, and man but the shadow of its effects.

In its widest sense, Hegel's philosophy is an attempt to make the acquaintance of Schelling's primordial entity—the Absolute. As a necessary preparation he annihilated the finite, or, to use his own language, the categories of the finite which stood in his way; and when he had done so, behold, the Absolute had crumbled with them. The heavens were void. There has been nothing, there is nothing, there will be nothing, save a constant evolution, a continuous development, with death for a goal. And, after all, what is the lesson that history conveys? What, indeed, if it be not this, that whatever is born, is born to die.

The idolatry, the infatuation of Hegel's dis-

ciples was without precedent or parallel. The streets and beer-halls echoed with discussions on the identity of contradictories. The Idea, the Absolute, the Ich and the non-Ich, were every-night topics. Metaphysics hung over Berlin like a London fog. Hegel was not only a popular teacher, he was a national idol. His dialectic prestidigitations had all the charm which attaches to the unfathomable. That he was a charlatan is clear, but that he was revered is certain. Among the group of mourners that assembled about his tomb, one, a theologian, likened him to Jesus. More recently, Scherer compared him to Napoleon. Yet on his death-bed Hegel was heard to mutter, "Only one man understood my philosophy, and he only half-caught its import."

After such a confession, one might well offer him the viaticum and hum a requiem over his seventeen in-octavos. And yet in vain. Hegel's influence is too substantial to be quieted by any requiescat, however determined. In spite of the hilarity of the impolite, his spectre looms through the most rational forms of contemporary negation. In the core of his philosophy there broods a sphinx that still defies.

When the bewilderment which Hegel excited subsided, the faith which he had inculcated was questioned; belief soon gave way to heresies, and the metaphysical assembly divided itself into dissenting camps. From one of these issued

the philosophy which counted Emerson and Carlyle among its exponents. In the uproar of another, Strauss, Feuerbach, Bruno and Stirner have pointed to an eternal grave and taken the nimbus from a god. It is owing to the instruction of a third that Vacherot has occupied his time in showing that the idea of perfection is God, but that perfection does not exist; and it was something of the original spirit that smoothed the way for the amiable fumisteries of Ernest Renan.

In the days when Hegelism was at its apogee, there appeared in Berlin a young man who declined to take any other part in the general intoxication than that of spectre at the feast. His contempt for the sophist, the pachyderm hydrocephali, and all the pedantic eunuchs who made up what he was wont to term the apocalyptic retinue of the bestia trionfante, was sumptuous in its magnificence. So sumptuous even, that he took counsel from an attorney as to the exact limit his contempt might reach without making him amenable to a suit for defamation. Then, reassured, he began an attack. "Hegel's philosophy," he said, "is sufficient to cause an atrophy of the intellect. It is a crystallised paralogism, an abracadabra, a puff of bombast, and a wishwash of phrases which in its monstrous construction compels the mind to form impossible contradictions." For its preparation he offered a receipt which is homeopathic in its

simplicity. "Dilute a minimum of thought in five hundred pages of nauseous phraseology, and for the rest trust to the Teuton patience of the reader."

A few years before, this violent yet cautious young man had written a work which he signed in full letters, Arthur Schopenhauer, and entitled, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*. This work, which he thought would shake the sophistry of all civilisation, had been left unnoticed and neglected on the back book-shelves of its Leipzig publisher. It is said that he smarted at this inattention, and that his aggressiveness and contempt of Hegel, and not of Hegel alone, but of Fichte and Schelling, the three sophists, as he was pleased to call them, was the outcome of envy. Whether or not this statement is true, is a matter of small importance. The point to be noted is, that thirty years later Hegel was largely forgotten, and the works of his obscure opponent were welcomed with an enthusiasm which has been expanding ever since.

"The World as Will and Idea" is an atheology compounded of Buddhism, Tauism and Epicurism, a mosaic of Oriental and classic negations worked out by an original and brilliant thinker. If the seventeen in-octavos already alluded to may be regarded as the apotheosis of the *arrière-pensée*, then, in comparison, this philosophy, together with its complementary monographs, represents the renaissance of common-sense.



Schopenhauer was not a pantheist. Had he possessed any of the views of ordinary orthodoxy, the belief, for instance, in

"L'univers  
Où règne un Jehovah dont Satan est l'envers,"

he might possibly have read the banns over Nature and Satan, but he never would have identified the former with God. Nor was Schopenhauer a materialist. He was a theorematist of force, but atoms found no place in his system. Yet if he must be catalogued, it will perhaps be safest to say that he was an idealist who saw the inutility of dream. Kant's *Kritik*, from which all German metaphysics proceeds, had shown him that reason must either be confined within the limits of experience, or else let loose into an absolute idealism. The three sophists had disgusted him with the supersensible, and yet he felt suffocated in the narrow limits of the real. There was yet a middle course, and that course he took. It was useless to ask whence the world comes or whither it tends, but it would not be impertinent to state *what it is*; and the statement which Schopenhauer made to the public was to the effect that the world is but the perception of a perceiver, a simple representation, a mere idea which man carries with him to the tomb, and which in the absence of a thinker to think it would not exist at all.

In the *Cogita*, a note-book of which extracts have been selected by Schopenhauer's literary



executor,\* is the following passage: "Two things were before me, two bodies, regularly formed, beautiful to see. One was a vase of jasper, with a border and handles of gold. The other was an organism, a man. When I had admired them sufficiently from without, I begged the genie who accompanied me to let me visit within. This permission was accorded. In the vase I found nothing save the pressure of weight, and between the parts some obscure reciprocal tendency which I have heard designated as cohesion and affinity. But when I entered the other object, my surprise was so great as to be almost untellable : in legends and fairy-tales there is nothing more unbelievable than the spectacle which I beheld. In this object, or rather in its upper end, called the head, and which from without looks like anything else, I saw nothing less than the world itself ; I saw the immensity of space in which all is contained, the immensity of time in which everything moves, and therewith the prodigious variety of objects that fill both space and time ; but, what is most astounding, I saw myself coming and going ! That is what I discovered in this object that was barely larger than a large fruit ; in this object which the headsman can dissever with a single blow, and that, too, in such wise as to plunge into sudden and eternal night the whole of the world that it contains. And the amusing part of it all

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\* Arthur Schopenhauer. Von ihm. Ueber ihn. Frauenstädt.

is, that if objects of this sort did not sprout like mushrooms, continuously prepared to receive a universe that is ever ready to subside into chaos, and did not give and take like a ball the great idea (*Vorstellung*) which is identical in each, and of which the identity is expressed with the word objectivity, the world would no longer exist."

Schopenhauer was not far from agreeing with Berkeley that the world is a phantasmagoria, a transformation-scene existing in fancy, or, as the Brahmans declared, a mirage evoked for the entertainment of the Supreme. The source and origin of the exterior world lay in the representative faculty which creates it and with which it disappears. Matter, according to him, is a lie that is truth; it is not an illusion, it is correlative with the intelligence; the two rise and fall together; separated, they could not exist; one is a reflection of the other. Properly speaking, they are the same thing examined from different points. But what is this same thing? Schopenhauer answers with a word, It is Will.

This Will should not be taken to mean the conscious act of a higher Intelligence. It is a force, invariable, identical and equal, of which gravitation, electricity, heat—in fact, every form of activity from the fall of an apple to the founding of a monarchy, from a cataclysm to a blade of grass, from the choir of planets to the invisible molecule—is merely a derivative and nothing more. In Nature, it is a blind, unconscious power; in man, it is the foundation of being.

This theory, which Schopenhauer expounded with a great luxuriance of vivid argument, and in a style that is crystal in its clarity, coincides in the aptest manner with the doctrine of evolution. During the early ages of the world's formation, the objectivity of this force was, he says, limited to inferior forms ; but when the conflict of chemical forces had ended, and the granite, like a tombstone, covered the combatants, it irrupted in the world of plant and forest. The air, decarbonised, was then prepared for animal life, and the Will's objectivity realised a new form. Fish and crustaceans filled the sea, gigantic reptiles covered the earth, and gradually through innumerable forms, each more perfect than the last, the propulsion ascended to man.

Schopenhauer declined to believe that either here or in another planet a being superior to man could possibly exist ; and that for the reason that with enlarged intelligence he would consider life too deplorable to be supported for a moment. As a consequence, the Will's objectivity can ascend no higher. Its latest manifestation is even the final term of its progress, for with it has come the possibility of its denial, the possibility that some day it may be throttled into extinction and choked back into the chaos from which it sprang.

In all the grades of its manifestations, Will, he taught, dispenses with any end or aim. It simply and ceaselessly strives, for striving is its sole nature. But as any hindrance of this striving, through an obstacle placed between it and its tem-

porary aim, is called suffering, and the absence of any obstacle, satisfaction,—it follows, if the obstacles it meets outnumber the facilities it encounters, that, having no final end or aim, there can be no end and no measure of suffering.

That pain does outbalance pleasure is a fact too well established to need discussion here. Pain begins with the lowest types of animal life, becomes acute with the nervous system of the vertebrates, increases in proportion to the development of the intelligence; and as intelligence attains distinctness, pain advances with it, until what Mr. Swinburne calls the gift of tears finds its supreme expression in man. And man is not a being to be envied. He is the concretion of a thousand necessities. His life, as Schopenhauer has it, is a fight for existence, with the certainty of defeat in the end; and even when his existence is assured, there comes a struggle with a shadowy burden, an effort to kill time, and a vain attempt to escape ennui.

Nor is ennui a minor evil. It is not every one who can get away from himself. Schopenhauer could, it is true; but in so doing he noted that its ravages depicted on the human countenance an expression of absolute despair, and made beings who love each other as little as men do, seek eagerly the society of each other. In this way, between effort and attainment, the life of man rolls on. The wish is in its nature pain, and satisfaction soon begets satiety. No matter what fortune may have done, no matter

what a man may be or what he may possess, pain can never be avoided. Efforts to banish it effect, if successful, only a change of form. It may appear as want or care for the maintenance of life. If this preoccupation be removed, back it comes again in the mask of love, jealousy, hatred or ambition; and if it gain entrance through none of these avatars, it comes as simple boredom, against which we strive as best we may. Even in this latter case, if we get the upper hand, we shall hardly do so, Schopenhauer says, without letting pain in again in one of its earlier forms. And then the dance begins afresh; for life, like a pendulum, swings ever backward and forward between pain and ennui.

The one relief, a relief which at best is momentary and accidental, is in that impersonal contemplation in which the individual is effaced, and only the pure, knowing subject subsists. This condition Schopenhauer praises as the painless state which Epicurus described as the highest good, the bliss of the gods. Therein man is freed from the yoke of Will; the penal servitude of daily life ceases as for a sabbath; the wheel of Ixion stands still. The cause of this he was at no loss to explain, and he did so, it may be added, in a manner poetically logical and peculiar to himself.

“Every desire is born of a need, of a privation or of a suffering. When satisfied, it is lulled; but for one that is satisfied, how many are unappeased! Desire, moreover, is of long duration;



its exigencies are infinite ; while pleasure is brief and narrowly measured. Pleasure, too, is but an apparition that is destined to be succeeded by another. The first is a vanished illusion ; the second an illusion that lingers still. Nothing is capable of appeasing Will, nor of permanently arresting it. The best we can do is like the alms tossed to a beggar, which, in preserving his life to-day, prolongs his misery to-morrow. While, then, we are dominated by desires and ruled by Will, so long as we give ourselves up to hopes that delude and fears that alarm, we have neither peace nor happiness. But when an accident, an interior harmony lifting us for the moment from out the torrent of desire, delivers the spirit from the oppression of Will, turns our attention from everything that solicits it, and all things seem as freed from the allurements of hope and personal interest, then repose, vainly pursued, yet ever intangible, comes to us of itself, bearing with open hands the plenitude of the gift of peace."

Contemplation is then an enfranchisement. It delivers us for a moment from ourselves ; it suspends the activity of Will ; and in raising man out of misery into the pure world of ideas, brings him a foretaste of that repose which is the freedom of the non-existent. But the liberation from the trammels of Will which is found in art and disinterested contemplation, is a solace that is momentary and accidental. That which is more desirable is a complete and unfettered freedom. The cause of evil is known ; it is the affirmation



of the Will-to-live. The remedy is its denial. The Will affirms itself when, after an acquaintance with life, it persists as much in willing as in the first moment when it was a mere blind necessity. The Will denies itself when it renounces life, when it frees itself through a persistent abdication, and abolishes itself of its own accord.

In this there is no question of suicide. For suicide, far from being a denial of the Will-to-live, is one of its strongest affirmations. The man who takes his own life really wants to live.

What he does not want are the miseries and trials attendant on his particular existence. He abolishes the individual, but not the race. The species continues, and pain with it. To be scientifically annihilated, life should be abolished not only in its suffering, but in its empty pleasures as well. Its entire inanity should be recognised, and the whole root cut once and for all. In explaining in what manner this is to be accomplished, Schopenhauer carried his reader far off into the shadows of the Orient. On the one side is the lethargy of the Rishis ; on the other, the Tauists drugged with opium ; while above all rises the phantasy of the East, the dogma of metempsychosis.

As the present writer has elsewhere explained,\* Schopenhauer gives the name of Will to that force which in Indian philosophy is held to

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\* The Philosophy of Disenchantment. Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Boston

resurrect with man across successive lives, and with which the horror of ulterior existences reappears. It is from this nightmare that we are summoned to awake, but in the summons we are told that the awakening can only come with a recognition of the true nature of the dream. The work to be accomplished is therefore less physical than moral. We are not to strangle ourselves in sleep; we are to rise out of it in meditation.

"In man," Schopenhauer says, "the Will-to-live advances to consciousness, to that point where it can choose between its continuance or abolition. Man is the saviour. Nature awaits her redemption through him. He is at once the priest and the victim."

If, then, in the succeeding generations the appetite for liberty has been so highly cultivated that a widespread and united compassion is felt for all things, then through continence absolute and universal, that condition will be produced in which subject and object disappear, and—the sigh of the egotist Will once choked thereby into a death-rattle—the world, delivered from pain, will pass into that peace which passeth all understanding, into the Prajna-Paramita, the "beyond all knowledge," the Buddhist goal where nothing is.

"It is this," Schopenhauer exclaims in his concluding paragraph, "it is this that the Hindus have expressed in the empty terms of Nirvâna and re-absorption in Brahm. I am, of course,

aware that what remains after the abolition of the Will, is without effect on those in whom it still works. But to those in whom it has been crushed, what is this world of ours, with its suns and stellar systems? *Nothing.*"

Among thinking people, Schopenhauer's admirers are to-day sufficiently frequent to defy enumeration. The theory of force, which was his chief originality, has found few serious adherents; fewer still are they who pin any faith to his plan for the extinction of humanity; it is his classic insistence on the immedicable misery of life, it is the pessimism which he expounded, but which was no more his own invention than is atheism, that has multiplied the translations and editions of his works. For thirty years these works were unnoticed. But Schopenhauer, who was very blithe in his misanthropy, snapped his fingers at the inattention of the public; he knew that Time, who is at least a gentleman, would bring him his due unasked. "My death," he said, "will be a canonisation, the extreme unction, a baptism." Yet before he died, fame and honours came and found him unsurprised. "Time has brought his roses at last," he said. "But see," he added, touching his silvered hair, "they are white."

The most prominent of Schopenhauer's successors is Dr. Eduard von Hartmann. On many points this gentleman separates widely from the master. In matters ontological and teleological there is a variance that is noticeably large. But

their pessimism is the same ; if any difference is discernible, it is merely in this, that the tone of the later comer has gained from recent science the steadiness and assurance that comes of broader knowledge.

Dr. von Hartmann, who sits at the head of contemporary metaphysicians, is a transcendental realist. His doctrine is a pantheism, or, as he prefers to call it, a monism, in which nihilism and idealism are found in equal parts, and one which has given to Hegelism a new and unexpected activity. Nature to him is truly divine ; but the misery of existence is irremediable, or at least will continue to be so until advancing science has taught in what way the clamour of life may be quelled. That which the Hindu termed Atma, that which Spinoza designated as Substance—in short, the universal and undetectable force which has made all things what they are, is called by him the Unconscious. The Unconscious is sovereignly wise, and the world is admirable in every respect ; it is existence that is irreclaimable in its misery.

The originality of this philosophy consists in a theory of optimistic evolution as counterbalanced by a pessimistic analysis of life ; but the originality is not lost in its conclusion, in which it is argued that, as the world's progressus tends neither to universal nor individual happiness, the great aim of science should be to emancipate man from a love of life, and in this wise lead the world back to chaos. The interest of the Un-

conscious is opposed to our own. It is to our advantage not to live; it is to the advantage of the Unconscious that we should do so, and that others should be brought into existence through us. The Unconscious, therefore, in the furtherment of its aims, has surrounded man with such illusions as are capable of deluding him into a belief that life is a pleasant thing well worth the living. The instincts within us are the different forms beneath which the desire to live is at work, and with which the Unconscious moulds man to its profit. Hence the energy witlessly expended for the protection of an existence which is but the right to suffer; hence the erroneous idea which is formed of the happiness derivable from life; and hence, too, the modification of past disenchantments through the influence of fresh and newer hopes. But when in the old age of the world, when humanity has divested itself of the belief that happiness is obtainable in this life, when it has lost all faith in the promise of another—in fact, when every illusion has been dissipated, when hope, love, ambition and gold are recognized as chimeras, or at least as incentives to activity which cause more pain than pleasure—then, science aiding, humanity will perform its own execution, and Time at last will cease to be.

Such is Dr. von Hartmann's conception of life, and such is the idea he has formed of the destiny of the world. In regard to the latter, nothing need now be said; but it may be noted



that to the general public his theory of pleasure and pain has not seemed wholly satisfactory. There have been many attempts to confute his pessimism, and many attempts to show that life, so far from being immedicable in its misery, is a well-spring of delight. And to many, doubtless, it has so seemed. But a point of view is not an argument. Whether life is held to be valuable, or whether it is held to be valueless, its nature in either case remains unchanged. To the obtuse it is usually the one; to the sensitive it is generally the other. But to the impersonal observer, the disinterested witness, to him who looks back through the shudders of history, and who gazes into a future that will be as inexplicable as the past, to him who feels some sympathy for the suffering, some compassion for the distressed and some pity for those in pain, life seldom seems other than an immense, an unnecessary affliction.

Why, asked Voltaire, with that leer which de Musset has made immortal, Why is there anything? An answer often given to this question is, that the ultimate reason of things is discoverable only in matter and motion. In theological circles the advocates of this explanation are not in good repute. In polite society it is considered as bad form to hold such theories as it is to carve salad or guillotine asparagus. In fact, beyond the jurisdiction of the scientific world



the materialist has a bad name. The pantheist, *passé encore*. Pantheism is vague and poetic, and apprehended with difficulty. But the materialist brings a different guitar. His conception of the universe demands but little study to seem tolerably clear. Besides, in his heart he seems to say, There is no God, and the appearance of that inward speech is not compatible with good manners. Society has a stronger leaning to affirmations than to negations; in fact, as Rousseau has pointed out, the average intellect prefers to be wrong in its belief than to have none at all. The materialist, standing as he does in opposition to theological tenets, is therefore eyed askant, and, what is more, is called an atheist when his back is turned.

Parenthetically it may be noted that the historical definition of an atheist is a citizen who refuses to worship the gods which the authorities of the state have appointed as worthy of worship. In modern parlance the word has acquired a sharper tone, and is generally used in reference to whoso disbelieves in the supernatural. In the coming centuries it is possible that it will cease to be a term of reproach. Indeed, its rehabilitation has in certain quarters already begun. But be this as it may, there are still few thinkers who hear themselves called atheists without experiencing some bewilderment. "Tell a philosopher," Heine said, "that his theories are atheistic, and he will be as much surprised as would a geometrician on learning that his triangles were red."

The denomination is as impertinent to the views of the one, as the colour is to the triangles of the other. Not every one, however, has had the privilege of sitting at Heine's feet, and the expression continues to be flung, with more or less vigour, at all systems of rationalistic thought, though at none more virulently than at materialism.

As has been hinted in earlier chapters, materialism is as old as philosophy itself. In India, it was a precursor of Buddhism; in China, it antedates Laou-tze. In classic antiquity, Democritus, Epicurus and Lucretius were among its advocates. Arrested by Christianity, it was imprisoned all through the middle ages; but when, over a century ago, it at last escaped, thrones and altars fell before it. It is, however, only within recent years that materialism received the endorsements of science. The standard-bearer of this movement, a movement all the more significant in that it was a reaction against Hegelian abstractions, was Moleschott. His principal work, the *Krieslauf des Lebens*, awoke Germany from her stupor. It was attacked, applauded and abused. The thinking world, which since Hegel's death had been twirling its thumbs, turned toward it expectant eyes. The hypothesis of an indefinite circulation of matter passing ceaselessly from life to death and from death to life, was old enough to seem quite new, and the axiom, Without force, no matter; without matter, no force, was listened to with grave attention.

The *Kreislauf des Lebens* inspired any number of affiliated works. Vogt, Lowenthal, Czolbe and Rudolphe Wagner made themselves prominent in its defence. Old-fashioned methods were abandoned. Psychology was put aside. Since there was no psyche, of what use could it be? Metaphysics was relegated to the night from which it had sprung. Modern materialism determined to support its dogmas with the sciences which are called exact. And Büchner, mailed with astronomy, chemistry, geology, physiology and natural history, produced in *Kraft und Stoff* the text-book of the new belief. Thereafter it only needed a hymnal to be complete. The deficiency has been supplied by Richepin's *Blasphèmes*.

The first principle of scientific materialism is the inseparability of matter and force. Matter is not a vague substance on which force grapples from without. In the absence of the one, the other is inconceivable, save perhaps by way of hypothesis. Without force, matter would enter at once into a formless void. Without matter, force would fade into a region of pure abstractions. Endeavour, for instance, to represent matter without force, that is, without the power of cohesion or affinity, attraction or repulsion, and, presto! the very idea of matter disappears. In like measure, an effort to represent force without matter results in a similar dénouement.

The second principle is that force and matter are indestructible. There are transformations,

there are varieties in their manifestations, but in the sum of their effects the intensity is undiminished. Burn a log of wood, and the scales of a chemist will show that not a particle of matter has been destroyed. "Annihilate a particle of matter," said Spinoza, "and the world will crumble." Not an atom can lose itself in immensity, and to immensity not an atom can be added. The flux and reflux of things show beneath incessant variations the same persistent and invariable aggregate. There is a circulation of materials of which each fortuitous combination has its beginning and its end, but in some one form or another the materials meet again and interconnect anew.

As with matter, so with force. What disappears on one side reappears on another. Friction produces fire, motion is obtained by steam. The amount of movement expended is recovered in the amount of heat; the amount of heat dissipated is recovered in the amount of motion. Force, then, like matter, is immortal. It may be transformed, but never destroyed. From these considerations, materialism concludes that, as that which is indestructible can have had no beginning, matter and force cannot have been created. *Ex nihilo nihil, in nihilum nil posse reverti.* The transformation of something into nothing is as inconceivable, says Lebon, as is the creation of something from nothing. And Taine adds, "There is nothing but matter and motion. Space is the infinity of matter, as time is the

eternity of motion." Matter and force are, then, eternal. But eternity is shared alone by them. Dust we are, to dust we shall return.

Matter and force being eternal, their laws are immutable. Were it otherwise, the properties of matter would change, and on the tablets of experience no change is recorded. Nature has never varied. Her laws are the mechanical relation of forces which, in disclosing no trace of a higher Will, turn superstition into a vagabond that has not where to lay its head. Time, in which all things unroll, is the great, the one creator.

The novelty of modern materialism, a novelty which distinguishes it from other systems, is that it claims to rest its affirmations on a basis which is strictly scientific. Its explanation of the universe by means of the action of natural forces, its reduction of natural forces to the variable modes of the force inherent in nature, are indeed supported by physics, chemistry and physiology. But into certain regions that it attempts to penetrate, it has not been preceded by any avant-courier that at all resembles exact knowledge.

The hypothesis that the attraction of all ponderable matter which maintains the planets in their orbits, must at one time have been in a condition to mould the universe from the cosmic dust spread through space, is the starting-point of materialistic cosmogony. This hypothesis, hazarded by Kant, signed by Laplace and attested by Herschel, is crowned by another, which is as opulent in vistas as is the retrospect of the first.



It is to the effect that the earth, like her lost satellite whose fragments have deluged the globe, will in turn be disembowelled and tossed through space. Historically these hypotheses are not new. Entertaining as the conjunction may appear, they are part of Buddhist lore. But they are a part of Buddhism which is as vague as it is poetic. In materialism, if there is less vagueness, there is also less poetry. Materialism is nothing if not matter-of-fact. Starting, then, from the hypothesis that a mass of cosmic matter originally filled the space which our planetary system occupies, and that, in accordance with the laws of gravitation which draw the parts to the centre, the sun was formed by the gradual concentration of its elements, it is not difficult to fancy a fragment of nebulosity detached from the centre and shot through space, developing first in a collection of gases, then into molecules that the rotatory movement fused and ignited, and which in cooling formed a crust above an interior furnace. This flight of fancy accomplished, it is yet easier to imagine the condensation of vapours into rain, the growth of plants and the birth of the monera from which man descends.

And life? Is it then, as Marcus Aurelius in his sceptred melancholy suggested, but a halt between two eternities? Bah! Away with phrases! A bottle containing carbonate of ammonia, chloride of potassium, phosphate of soda, chalk, magnesia, sulphuric acid and silex, is life in its most ideal, in its completest expression.



Some sixty million years ago, when primitive man blinked at a brighter sky than ours, he thought of the archeolithic ape, if he thought at all, as an inferior animal. And, indeed, there could have been little in common between the shuddering orang-outang and the speechless yet ferocious troglodyte who with an uprooted tree crushed the skull of a lion and then sucked the fuming brain.

The link between the two was as undiscernible to him as to the theologian of to-day. And yet, as Huxley has pointed out, the anatomical difference between man and a gorilla is less than between a gorilla and an inferior ape. And, to pursue the same line of argument, the difference between a Shakespeare and a savage is infinitely greater than between a savage and a brute. Why, a magpie is cleverer than the aboriginal Australian ; but at the same time the cleverness of a magpie is not a proof of the evolution of man.

The old coquette, this world of ours, conceals her age, but her biography is under our feet. As we read backwards through it, her years mount up into ten hundred millions. The date of that initial catastrophe, her birth, is yet unreachèd ; but we know enough of her past to be sure that it has been long enough and sufficiently immoral for many things to happen of which our philosophy may dream though it cannot prove. Among these things are spontaneous generation and the descent of man. When these are substantiated, materialism will have proved its claim ; its sway

will be undisputed ; but until then, its arguments have as much evidential value as so many astro-gals.

In attempting to explain the organic by the inorganic, the main argument was the alleged birth of insects in putrefied matter. This argument was routed by Redi, who enveloped some meat in a light gauze, on which, a little later, eggs were found to have been deposited by passing flies, and at once the mystery was explained. The discovery of the microscope brought new hopes to the materialists. The animalculæ which were found in certain infusions appeared to have been produced without the assistance of antecedent germs. The falsity of this conclusion was demonstrated by Schwann, and the hypothesis of abiogenesis was abandoned, until Pouchet brought it again into fashion. But experiments recently made by M. Pasteur contradict those made by Pouchet ; and so far as contemporary science is competent to give a decision, the arguments of the anti-vitalists are inadequate to support their case.

But though the theory of spontaneous generation must be abandoned, at least for the moment, the materialists are by no means at their wits' end. Life has arisen in some manner, and why not from the interaction of molecular forces ?

One of the most charming hypotheses on this subject was advanced a few years ago by Sir William Thomson. To this gentleman, life, or perhaps it would be better to say a germ poten-

tially alive, that is, having within itself the tendency to assume a definite living form, first visited the earth in a meteor. If it is proper to assume that meteors are fragments of shattered and once peopled worlds, it may be assumed with equal propriety that some of these fragments are partially intact. The moment, then, that it is admitted that beside our own there are a number of life-supporting worlds and that other worlds have existed in anterior epochs, it would not seem improbable that germ-bearing meteors have moved and do still move through space. As a consequence, any germ-bearing meteor which fell upon the earth during the time when it was destitute of life may have been the unconscious cause of the failure which we are now enjoying.

Dr. Zoellner, a German scientist trained in all the illiberalities of official optimism, attempted to refute this hypothesis on the ground that when a meteor enters our atmosphere, the friction of the air makes it incandescent and consequently incapable of preserving and transporting any germ, however potentially alive. To this refutation Helmholtz made answer, that only the surface of meteors become heated, and that germs might readily remain unharmed in interior crevices, or if on the surface might on reaching our atmosphere be blown from their conveyance by the wind, and that, too, before the heat was great enough to cause their destruction. But if this solution be accepted, the origin of life on other

planets remains still to be explained. It may be then, as Helmholtz has suggested, that life is co-eternal with matter, and its germs, transported from one planet to another, develop wherever they find a propitious spot. But this, too, is merely an hypothesis, and one that has not the slightest evidence in its favour. The enigma of life is for the present a part of the unknowable. But whether it will always remain so is another question. The differences which once were supposed to constitute a barrier between the vertebrate and the non-vertebrate no longer exist. The modifications by which the quadrupedal reptile became a bipedal bird have been clearly shown. Forty years ago, there was no evidence that such a demonstration would ever be made. Forty years hence, who shall say but that the missing link may be discovered, or the manufacture of the organic from the inorganic begun? As Professor Huxley has hinted, no one who has watched the gradual development of a complicated animal from the protoplasm which constitutes the egg of a frog or a hen, will deny that a similar evolution of the whole animal world from a like foundation is at least within the bounds of possibility.

Of the various creeds which man has been pleased to invent, the youngest is positivism. The position which this system of thought has acquired is due to its own merit. It cannot, like

pantheism, look back through the terraces of time and claim the quaterings of race. Nor can it, like materialism, bedeck itself with Greek insignia. Among philosophies, positivism is a parvenu. As such, it is viewed with scorn, enthusiasm and indifference.

Positivism made its début a little over forty years ago. Its name was its fortune. There was in the sound of it an invitation to nearer acquaintance. But when the acquaintance was made, the name was found to partake of the nature of a lure. Relativism, if less attractive, would have been a clearer description. For positivism, if positive at all, is positive that there is nothing positive. Its sponsor was Auguste Comte.

If the realisation of the ambitions of youth may be regarded as the criterion of a successful career, the life of this thinker cannot be considered a failure. At a comparatively early age the outlines of his doctrine appear to have been clearly defined. The outlines sprang of a suggestion of Saint-Simon, who was wont to declare that all knowledge should be co-ordinated into one vast and comprehensive synthesis, but their development was accomplished without material indebtedness. In synthetising knowledge into a single system of thought, Comte proposed nothing less than the abolishment of theology and metaphysics, and the re-organisation of the occident through a philosophy of his own manufacture. In 1842, the sixth and last volume of this philosophy was given to the public, and with it the



knell of all religions was supposed to have been rung. Ten years later, to the utter bewilderment of his disciples, Comte proclaimed the necessity of founding a new religion, of which the sovereign pontiff was to be none other than himself.

In an earlier paragraph it has been hinted that positivism is positive that there is nothing positive, a phrase which, from a Comtist standpoint, may be taken to mean that the essence of things escapes us. We can understand the interconnection of facts—that is, their direct antecedents and immediate sequences—but the initial causes and ultimate results are inaccessible to the intellect. In a word, there is nothing except material phenomena and the laws thereof. As this principle is the pivot on which the entire philosophy turns, a momentary examination may not be without benefit.

Many a sceptic has filled his hours in showing that things are not what they seem, but none of them, however revolutionary, have disputed the reality of consciousness, or denied the phenomena that are manifest in thought, feeling and volition. In affirming, therefore, that the objects apprehended by the senses are the only apprehensible phenomena, positivism apparently displays a radicalism which is as audacious as it is novel. It is of course possible and even proper to regard thought, feeling and volition as products of the body, but it would be a misuse of language to assert that they are material phenomena ; and, as positivism's first tenet is that there is nothing



except material phenomena, it would seem that, like any other screw, the before-mentioned pivot is loose. On the other hand, it may be objected that the phenomena called internal are unobservable, and that any attempt to distinguish them from their external elements results merely in demonstrating the vainness of the endeavour. If this view be accepted, positivism is found less rickety than it first appeared, and the introductory statement may be welcomed at once and without further hesitation.

If, then, as positivism asserts, the essence of things escapes us, any speculation on the origin and purpose of the world is profitless. On such and kindred subjects the mind should be without conjecture. It is only natural that man should have been on the *qui vive* in his effort to discover efficient and final causes, but his effort has never been successful. "If God did not exist," said Voltaire, "the world would have invented him." "Which," a wit replied, "is precisely what the world has done."

The mobility of phenomena, the fugitiveness of sensations, the impermanency of the actual, the real which each moment ends and begins anew, have, in all ages, incited to a knowledge of the unknowable. But the knowledge has not been obtained, and it was in view of the impracticability of the attempt that Comte ventured to suggest what may be termed a middle course. In the effort to pierce the impenetrable, humanity, he said, has passed and is still passing through

certain stages of thought which correspond to those of childhood, adolescence and maturity. The first is the age of theology ; the second, of metaphysics ; and the third, of science. This doctrine, which is known as the law of the three states, conveys the suggestion alluded to, together with a theory which is as liberal as the sea. It runs somewhat as follows :

In the infancy of thought, Nature is dowered with the same illusions to which man himself is subjected. Every object is animated, and the government of the universe is ascribed, not to invariable laws, but to sentient and intelligent beings. In everything that occurs is seen the manifestation of a direct intention, and each particular event is attributed to forces which are but the aggrandisements of those of man. In the advance of thought, these forces, whose prowess is discernible in effects which man is impotent to produce, become the gods, invisible yet multitudinous. Then, gradually, as arises the capacity of co-ordinating phenomena into separate groups, the number of divinities diminishes, until, through processes of generalisation, they are reduced to one, and behold, man has passed out of fetishism into polytheism, and from thence to a belief in a unique Creator.

But there is a further advance of thought, and in its train comes the suggestion that the uniformity noticeable in the universe is incompatible with the theory of an arbitrary Will. The initial conceptions are dismissed, the celestial and in-

accessible reason of things is banished, and realised abstractions are accepted instead. Nature is governed, not by an external power, but by internal and occult qualities. The reign of dryads and nymphs is passed, and their place is usurped by entities, by theories which deal with a plastic force and a vital principle. This is the second, or metaphysical state, which is of advantage in being a negation of the first and a preparation for the third, which latter is reached when men, weary of explanations that explain nothing, discover that what is necessary for the mind is not obligatory for things, and that a cause which is conceived by the one need not have a place among the others. Such is the positive, or scientific state of mind, to which, according to Comte, all humanity tends ; and such, too, is the middle course which he recommended to thoughtful and decorous persons.

Stripped of its verbal husks, the law of the three states may be reduced to a truism. In seeking the reason of things, men look first above, then within, and finally confess themselves vanquished.

The law of the three states which Stuart Mill called the backbone of the entire philosophy, but which is not particularly new nor particularly convincing—not new, because sketched by Kant in outline, and not convincing, because Comte himself declined to be bound by it—is supplemented by a classification of sciences from out of which was drawn a fresh one, called sociology.

In the study of facts, the interpretation of the experience which is written between the lines of history, sociology was to be the lever in the substitution of science for religion. It was to terminate the conflict between theology, which demands order without progress, and metaphysics, which aims at progress and turns its back on order. It was to arrest the retrogression of the one, and still the anarchy of the other. In the government of life it was to replace religion with science, and give to intelligence the guiding-strings of the world.

In mapping this programme, Comte fancied that sociology could be raised to the level of an exact science, and that through its influence all enlightened nations would join hands in the profession of identical doctrines. In the utopias in which he then lost himself, he planned a re-organisation of society on a basis which, if suggestive of Plato's Republic, is otherwise without value or allurements. There is, he pointed out, no such thing as liberalism in astronomy, physics or chemistry; and if it be otherwise in ethics and politics, it is because neither of them possess established principles. When they acquire them, as they will do when positivism begins its sway, the force of public opinion will disappear. A corporation of philosophers, salaried by the State and treated with the greatest respect, will have the entire charge of education, together with the right to counsel and direct each citizen in his private and public life, and enjoy, moreover, such

an amount of authority over students and thinkers as will enable them to prevent the latter from squandering their time and knowledge in speculations that are valueless to humanity, and oblige them to apply themselves to such investigations as may be deemed most important to general prosperity. The decrees which the corporation may formulate are not to be questioned, and, as the idea of the sovereignty of the people is one of the most pernicious that civilisation has advanced, but slight attention will be paid to the inclinations of the masses. In each nation there will be a governing body and a body governed, in which latter the citizen will occupy the position for which his abilities have fitted him. Thereafter religion and metaphysics will disappear. Scientific dissidence will be effaced, and an invariable and uniform political dogma will at last be accepted by united and peaceful nations.

To the clear-headed and matter-of-fact audience which was Comte's, theories such as these were viewed with suspicion. The idea that there is no God had in it nothing that was alarming; the prophecy of the overthrow of superstition and the general adoption of positivist tenets seemed not unreasonable; the prohibition against idle speculations and the complementary recommendation to treat only with the real were received with open favour; but the sturdiest could not look without terror on a future governed by philosophers.

When this horizon was disclosed, it is probable



that Comte had already entered into what is known as his pathological period. In earlier years he suddenly lost his reason, and as suddenly recovered it. The border-lands of genius and insanity are never well defined, and it is not unlikely that before the *Cours de philosophie positive* was completed, something of that of which he had too much, something of that weight of thought which obscures the vision and tips the scales of common-sense, was again at work, though this time more dumbly and dimly than before. Thereafter the champion of the actual who had wished to lead God to the frontiers, and there thank him kindly for his provisory services, lapsed into a morbid mysticism. The sceptre of the world which he had given to intellect was transferred to sentiment. It was for the heart to rule and for the intellect to obey.

The *Philosophie politique*, in which his ideas on this subject are conveyed, shows, even amid the luxuriance of luminous thought, the same evidence of mental decadence as is noticeable in Kant's *Kritik der Practischen Vernunft*. Both belong to the senilia of great minds. During the year that intervened between its appearance and the publication of his chief work, Comte conceived what his biographers term a platonic affection for a lady whose influence over him was of such a nature, that, aided by the historical meditations in which his life had been passed, he dreamed of a happiness that should be universal, and of a world that should be ruled, not



by a corporation of salaried philosophers, but by love in its purest and most disinterested form.

The pompous Religion of Humanity which he then evolved, and which has no more connection with positivism than an opera-bouffe has with logarithms, saddened the boldest among his adherents. It found adepts—what vagary has not? The altruism which it inculcated is certainly not without charm; but the deification of humanity past and future, the transformation of earth into a fetish, space into fate and numbers into virtues, are among the most deplorable instances of the aberrations of genius. After shutting out the unknowable, the door was opened to superstition; after banishing metaphysics, sentiment was beckoned in to occupy its place; religion was superseded by idolatry; and the heavens, that no longer told of the glory of God, were set ablaze with the memories of great men.

In its uncorrupted form, positivism is a modification of materialism. Among theologians there is a disposition to regard both in the same light. But no positivist likes to be called a materialist. He shows as much displeasure at the term as he would were he called a theist or a pantheist. And, indeed, the lines of demarcation, if not always broad, are none the less apparent. At the origin of things, theism places a personal and infinite Being; pantheism sees in all things the immanency of a Being that is infinite but impersonal; and materialism asserts that the cause of all things lies in the arrangement and

properties of force and matter. Positivism, on the other hand, knows nothing of an infinite Being, whether personal or impersonal; in the spheres that are inaccessible to it, it recognises nothing but matter and the properties of matter; but, unlike materialism, it draws no conclusions. According to Littré, positivism is simply a methodical, hierarchic arrangement of the general facts of science, excluding every subjective element, and accepting nothing that is not drawn from experience.

A positivist, moreover, shows no evidence of delight at being called an atheist. As Littré has described him, an atheist is in a certain measure a theologian. He is not entirely emancipated. He has his explanations of things; he knows how they began. He believes in the chance clash of atoms, or in occult forces, or in a first cause. Of all this the positivist knows nothing. He ignores productive atoms as well as a creating and ordaining force. But whoso thinks that history follows a development that is obedient to a natural law—whoso thinks that the origin of societies, the establishment or mutation of religion, the founding of empires, cities, castes, aristocracies, governments, oracles, prophecies, revelations, theologies, arts and industries, are due, one and all, to the faculties of man—whoso accepts this view has fully accomplished the cycle of mental emancipation. The moment that he leaves no place for the supernatural either in the organic or the inorganic,

either among cosmic phenomena or among those of history, that moment he passes initiate into the brotherhood of positivism.

The charm of positivism is the matter-of-fact position which it assumes before the insolvable. If it cuts no old knots, it brings no new tangles. It treats metaphysics with the respect which is due to all that is venerable ; in the presence of religion it puts the dialectic broadsword softly back in its sheath. It leaves the great query where it found it. And in this is its wisdom ; its agnosticism is its strength. Clamour as we may, there is no answer to our whys and wherefores. There is in us, about and beyond us, an enigma that will defy the Champollions of the future as it has routed the seers of the past. The reason of things lies beyond the sphere of knowledge, and the nearest approach that can be made is in a suspicion that all is relative.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A POET'S VERDICT.

THERE have been days in the history of the world when the poet was regarded with a respect that approached veneration. He was considered the oracle of the gods, and his voice was listened to with reverence. This pleasant custom has fallen into disuse. The gods have disappeared and carried the divine afflatus with them. In an age like the present, the demand for poets is slight. Their titles have been examined, and it has been found that to be useless is their one patent of nobility. As a consequence, the poet's vocation has seemed to many a synonym of the ridiculous. And yet, as Gautier with a charming affectation of naiveté remarked, an inability to write in verse can scarcely be considered as constituting a special talent. But there is another inconvenience: a poet is never rightly appreciated save by his peers; and as his peers are infrequent, the majesty which resides within him often lacks the trumpetings of a herald. Then, too, in an era of remorseless activity, it is only quiet people who live in the country that find

leisure to listen to the footfalls of the Muse. For the benefit of such as they, verse may be divided into three broad classes : that which pleases the author's enemies, that which pleases the author's contemporaries, and that which passes unobserved to pleasure the idlesse of posterity. Of these classes, the verse of Leconte de Lisle belongs to the third.

Any one who has taken an interest in French literature during the last decade can hardly have failed to notice the number of new writers that have come into being, and more particularly the inferiority of their work. In explanation of this surge of mediocrity, many theories might be advanced ; but perhaps the most palpable would be that the literature of our expiring century, after having passed from youth to virility, has begun to experience the maladies and garrulities of old age. But however the subject may be viewed, it is at least evident that the paladins of 1830, who were as revolutionary in literature as their ancestors were in religion, have passed away, and also that their methods have so far disappeared with them that the day before yesterday Victor Hugo seemed like a living anachronism. Readers latterly have refused to be interested in the phantasies of the romantics, and perhaps their pages were a trifle over-coloured ; but their excuse lay in the fact that literature had become impoverished through conventionalities ; there were synonyms instead of words ; and in place of

ample vocabularies there were small niceties of expression. All this the romantics did away with. They breathed health and vigour into an enervated dictionary, and startled Europe with the opulence of their adjectives.

It was in those victorious days that Gautier threw aside his brush and went in a famous red waistcoat to guy the philistines at the birth-night of *Hernani*. In graver years Gautier complained that in the eyes of the bourgeois he had never ceased to wear that crimson garment, and somehow, save among the liberal few, he has always been looked upon more or less askant. It has been said that it was his purpose to seek the hazardous and display it, but it must be admitted that what he had to say he told with a grace such as had been seldom heard before. He chose his words for their colour, for their aroma, as one may say; and it is related that he objected now and then to an accent because it took away something from the charm which the grouping of certain letters otherwise conveyed.

Through those days, too, Alfred de Musset passed with the indolence of a dissolute young god. He joined the ranks of the romantics, as did all men of talent, but he joined them more as an amateur than a professional: the familiar ballad in which the moon is represented as suspended over a steeple like a dot over an *i*, opened for him the doors of the *cénacle* without even giving him the trouble to knock. In



a subsequent poem he asked forgiveness for that misdeed ; and though he boasted that his Muse went bare of foot like Truth, she might still have been pictured as shod with buskins of gold.

Another of the heroes of this epoch was Alfred de Vigny. Some one has said that the face of a poet is never known until years and sorrow have marred its original beauty ; but to this rule de Vigny was an exception. He was famous when quite young, and his bust, as it stands to-day in the lobby of the Théâtre Français, arrests the attention even of the indifferent. At the time to which allusion is made, he mingled but little with his fellows, appearing only when the moral support of his presence was needed. In later years, in spite of his talent, his beauty and his position, de Vigny, devoured by melancholy, turned his back entirely upon the world, and retired into what Sainte-Beuve has termed his *tour d'ivoire*.

In the wake of these poets came the familiar figure of Charles Baudelaire. Recently he has been described as having had the appearance of a delicate prelate, a trifle depraved. This description might be suggested by the mere reading of his verse. In the work of every poet there is something of the individual, and it is probable that few have studied the chiselled lines which he worked up with even a shrewder eye for the Satanic than that which was given to Edgar Poe, without calling up some such picture of their author. Baudelaire entered the ranks when the battle was won, but nevertheless he managed to

flaunt a standard that has troubled the vision of many an after-comer.

So swiftly does time go by, that of these writers little more than tradition now remains. In the eyes of contemporary critics, de Musset is a dislocator of Alexandrines, de Vigny is a memory, Baudelaire a curiosity, and Gautier a model. Yet each of them left a legacy that is still disputed. From de Musset descends the gift of eloquence; in Baudelaire's testament is the heirloom of lurid effect; de Vigny has devised his morbidity; while Gautier's bequest is perfection in form. Taken together, they were the poetic embodiment of the agitation of which Voltaire, Holbach and Diderot were the heralds. "Je ne crois pas, ô Christ, à ta parole sainte," cried de Musset, and the cry was echoed by his fellow-workers.

In a literary sense, these poets were, on their first appearance, very generally looked upon as impertinent innovators, and in their assault upon the classicists they caused much rage and rhetoric. Viewed at this distance, the disturbance seems unnecessary; for, after all, what is romanticism but the art of pleasing one's contemporaries, and what is classicism but the art which delighted earlier generations? Turn about is always fair play. In a little while Hugo will be a classic, precisely as Racine is beginning to be considered a romantic. But be this as it may, the seething passion which in 1830 seemed more alluring than the chill restrictions of former years, gra-

dually disappeared, and its place was taken by the serene impassibility of another group of poets who were called the Parnassians.

The advent of this new school was necessarily less boisterous than that of their predecessors : for that matter, they excited more ridicule than anger ; and it is related that a cabman in a street row, after having called his adversary everything that was unpleasant, hurled at him with withering contempt as last and supreme reproach, the un-avengeable insult, "*Parnassien, va !*"

Of the poets who made up this group, the better known are MM. Sully-Prudhomme and François Coppée. Sully-Prudhomme is an avowed materialist and frankly pessimistic. His poems may be summarised as a series of very delicate impressions intermingled with a fair amount of philosophic suggestion. His repertory is not extensive. It consists in three or four themes and their variations—such, for instance, as the familiar aspiration toward the infinite, man's sentiment of nothingness before the immensity of the universe, the agony of doubt, and the usual communion with Nature. The limits of this range do not necessarily imply a lack of ability. The art in any form of verse consists merely in the skill with which one or more of half-a-dozen old-fashioned sentiments is rendered, and in this respect the work of Sully-Prudhomme is generally irreproachable. In his treatment of purely personal dramas, the mental and moral combats which we all of us wage with ourselves,

he leaves little to be desired, and it would be difficult to mention a poet who has entered more deeply than he into the psychological developments of the century. For all this he has received much praise, and if his verse is ever criticised, it is because it is at times a trifle vague. Sully-Prudhomme has been as honestly puzzled by the discord between the real and the ideal as any writer of his class; but in his perplexity his thought floats away to uncertain heights, and there disappears with a flutter of restless inquietude. To put the matter briefly, Sully-Prudhomme very often seems as though he were about to say something well worth the telling, but before he has gotten it safely on paper the force of the idea has vanished.

François Coppée is another of the dispersed Parnassians. His negations, if more carefully veiled than those of Sully-Prudhomme, are none the less discernible. He is at times dramatic, but his sadness is always insistent. To be sad is admittedly the poet's privilege; yet to be simply sad, and to express such a state of being as who should say, "I hunger" or "I thirst," is not necessarily poetic; rather is it commonplace. To be worth the telling, grief should express a thought that is neither humdrum nor familiar; it should lay bare fresh possibilities or set new limits to resignation: if it does not do this, then, however readily the tears may flow, however gracefully the grief be told, it is what a boulevardier would call *le vieux jeu*—the old story, of which we are

most of us thoroughly tired. It is this old story that M. Coppée re-tells; and though the telling is managed with much refinement, it is impossible to call it novel. M. Coppée has also much to say about his boredom. Boredom, however, is not a flexible topic; indeed, unless it is handled with unusual dexterity, there is a danger that the reader will find it even more irritating than the writer, and thereupon withdraw his attention and support. Boredom also is more of a fine art than is generally supposed, and not to every one is it given to disentangle original ideas from that which is flat and unprofitable. Leopardi and Baudelaire have done so, it is true; but between them they managed to throttle the subject and share the booty. For a later comer like M. Coppée, nothing was left.

MM. Prudhomme and Coppée have both sat at the feet of Leconte de Lisle. To-day they are better known than he, but neither of them have ventured to rate their work above that of their master. In this modesty much good taste is shown. He has none of their faults, and, moreover, he has genius, which both of them lack. In comparison with him they are as conceitists to Dante.

Leconte de Lisle is perhaps the most perfect poet of France. It is he who is the rightful heir to the legacies of the romantics, and these possessions he has rounded and improved with an erudition which embraces history, philology, archæology, anthropology, and doubtless much



more beside. In spite of this, or perhaps on that account, his literary luggage is scant. He has translated a few ancient authors, written a drama or two, and published three compact volumes of verse. In speaking of the latter, it is difficult to describe them in a phrase, though this perhaps may be accomplished in saying that they do not contain a commonplace line. The three volumes are respectively entitled, *Poèmes antiques*, *Poèmes barbares*, and *Poèmes tragiques*. The first division, which is largely made up of Vedic hymns and Greek idyls, is one in which the characteristics of the author are best displayed, and in which his impersonality is most strongly marked. Many of the poems in this series bring with them a haunting impression that they are translations from some unknown Valmiki, while others might be taken for the work of Max Müller turned poet.

When these poems were first published, they created among the lettered an intense admiration. It was admitted that lines of such splendour and impersonal serenity had never been hewn before; and certainly, after the ardour of the romantics, their impassibility could not have been other than a refreshing change. It was, however, the fortune of the book to appeal only to scholars; to the newspaper public it was unintelligible; the author had made no effort to please; and, moreover, he had declined to make any concessions to the ordinary reader. The result might have been foreseen; Brahmā was declared to lack actuality; and it was held to be tiresome to con-



strue a modern poet with a Greek dictionary. What, it was asked, has Juno done to be called Héré, and why must the sky be ouranos?

As was the case with the series just mentioned, the *Poèmes barbares* found favour only with the few. To the general public they seemed very subversive. They displayed a pessimism which was new to France, and which, being new, was eyed with suspicion. Then, too, Leconte de Lisle was calmly anti-theistic. The bravado of Maréchal is boyish in comparison to his grave disdain of things celestial. In the *Poèmes barbares* there are lines that startle and coerce, lines in which the horrible is expressed with such colour and yet with such austerity that the reader shudders as he reads and admires as he shudders. Beside them, the declamations of that dissolute Greuze of literature, Alfred de Musset, sound cracked and thin—like a man's laughter, as Mr. Swinburne has it, heard in hell.

The *Poèmes tragiques* are not as satisfactory as are the others. They are made up of a dozen or more recitals which have much to do with the shedding of blood, a few ballads, villanelles, pantoums and sestines, together with a bar or two of pure harmony.

Leconte de Lisle is the Goya of verse, and yet, through a delicious contradiction, one of the most noteworthy characteristics of his work is its constant evocation and suggestion of the beautiful. No other modern poet, except perhaps

Mr. Swinburne, has shown a better acquaintance with the road to Paphus. And it would be a task full of charm to follow him from the jungles of the Indian peninsula to the cool lakes of Norway, to fan Leïlah and kiss Glaucé. Unfortunately, the purpose of these pages will not permit of such pleasant digressions, and the beautiful must be neglected that the poet's anti-theism may be the more quickly understood. By way of introduction, a momentary examination of the poem *Qaïn* will not, it is imagined, cause any after reproach of time misspent.

The scenario is simple and audacious. The son of Elam, Thogorma the seer, a captive among the Assyrians, dreams of a night in the mysterious ages when the voice of God echoed through the universe, and in his dream he sees Henokhia, the city of giants, in whose highest tower is the tomb of Cain. Cain's descendants are wending their way homewards from the chase. Thogorma sees them disappear in the immense orb of the ramparts, while night, bringing a vague terror and dumb dread, mantles the great stairways that turn in red broad spirals to the winds. He hears the roar of lions, chained on the ascending steps, and beneath the porticos the clamours of crocodiles rise from the reservoirs. Then, abruptly, from the confines of the outlying desert, a spectre, loosed from Gehenna, surges through the shadows, and Thogorma hears the spirit anathematise Cain and all his race.

Cain awakened, stands upright in the granite sepulchre where for ten centuries he had slept with his face to the sky. His eyes, haunted by one supreme remembrance, contemplate through the preceding epochs the vanished days when the world was young ; and with his thoughts rich with the memory of the earth's primal innocence and beauty, he calls to the phantom to be silent and narrates his sombre history. Conceived while his parents were labouring under the divine malediction, his mother, Eve, swooning in the brambles, gave birth with a shriek of horror to Jehovah's victim, to him who was Cain. Nursed with tears, his boyhood knew no smile. What had he done, he wondered, to be punished too ? And so, later, in the knowledge of his exile he accosts the angel on guard at the gates of Eden, and learns that on the morrow he is to know the reason of his birth. On the morrow the reason is made apparent. Jehovah arms his hand against Abel, and incites him to kill the brother whom he tenderly loved.

Here ends Cain's account of his life ; but immediately, in his awakened thirst for vengeance, he prophesies that when Jehovah is wearied with the world and shall seek by means of the deluge to destroy it, he, Cain, will save the ark—which the poet represents as constructed in spite of Jehovah—whereupon man, no longer brave, but cowardly and envious, will rise from the flood with its mud in his heart. Cain, the avenger, continues :

"Dieu triste, Dieu jaloux qui dérobes ta face,  
 Dieu qui mentais, disant que ton œuvre était bon,  
 Mon souffle, ô Pétrisseur de l'antique limon,  
 Un jour redressera ta victime vivace.  
 Tu lui diras : Adore ! Elle répondra : Non !

. . . . .

Afin d'exterminer le monde qui te nie,  
 Tu feras ruisseler le sang comme une mer,  
 Tu feras s'acharner les tenailles de fer,  
 Tu feras flamboyer, dans l'horreur infinie,  
 Près des bûchers hurlants le gouffre de l'Enfer :

Mais . . . . .  
 . . . . .

Je ressusciterai les cités submergées,  
 Et celles dont le sable a couvert les monceaux :  
 Dans leur lit écumeux j'enfermerai les eaux :  
 Et les petits enfants des nations vengées,  
 Ne sachant plus ton nom, riront dans leurs berceaux !

J'effonderai des cieux la voûte dérisoire.  
 Par delà l'épaisseur de ce sépulchre bas  
 Sur qui gronde le bruit sinistre de ton pas,  
 Je ferai bouillonner les mondes dans leur gloire :  
 Et qui t'y cherchera ne t'y trouvera pas.

Et ce sera mon jour ! Et d'étoile en étoile,  
 Le bienheureux Eden longuement regretté  
 Verra renaître Abel sur mon cœur abrité ;  
 Et toi, mort et cousu sous la funèbre toile.  
 Tu t'anéantiras dans ta stérilité."

. . . . .

Apart from the wonder and majesty of the language, and apart, too, from the intuition which in earlier stanzas enabled the poet to call again into being the life of the past, *Qain*, on a first reading, seems to be merely a work of cultured

and harmonious blasphemy, and, indeed, so far as the blasphemy is concerned, nothing more vehement has been penned since Æschylus ; but yet on a re-reading *Qain* is found to be little else than an allegory of the protestation of the intellect against the unintelligible, a revolt at the mystery of pain.

This protestation, which is as old as philosophy, and which in recent years seems to have increased in volume and significance, has been conveyed by Leconte de Lisle in other poems with great originality, and with particular power in the parable of the *Corbeau*. Through this poem, as through *Qain*, there is a running accompaniment of muffled discontent, which in other verses finds a clear and decided note. Something of this same dissatisfaction was expressed by de Vigny and Alfred de Musset, and yet in their case one is inclined to fancy that the grievance was less reasoned than instinctive ; they were at odds, so to speak, with the inevitable ; life failed to hold what it had seemed to promise, and in consequence their complaints were more or less personal. But in Leconte de Lisle there is no evidence of personal disappointment, and nothing that can be construed as the outcome of an individual grievance. It is a part of his doctrine that an expression of pleasure or pain deforms the human visage, that the poet's correct attitude is the one which most nearly approaches the impassibility of the statue, and it is this theory which he has carried into his work.



It is difficult to say to what category of anti-theism Leconte de Lisle belongs. His pantheism is too evident to permit of his being called a materialist, and yet his materialism is so marked that it is difficult to suspect him of any other sympathies with the ideal than those which are purely poetic. He is too aggressive for an agnostic, and yet there are moments when he might be taken for a positivist. Perhaps it will be safest to say that he is a theoretic pessimist, a denomination which is broad enough to include any of the others, and at the same time is serviceable in conveying the exact shade of his thought.

The pessimism which is manifest in the verse of Leconte de Lisle has nothing of Renan's serenity, and none of the calculations of Von Hartmann. In his case it is the formal protest against the enigma of grief which characterises the philosophy of the earliest thinkers, but one which is entirely free from the shackles with which they delayed the hope of ultimate emancipation. It is not that the idea of absorption in Brahm, or the extinction in Pari-Nirvana, is disagreeable to him; on the contrary, they are dreams through which he lovingly trails his verse, but they are dreams.

"Pleurez, contemplateurs! Votre sagesse est veuve  
Vignou ne siege plus sur le lotus d'azur."

That of which he seems best convinced is the irremediable existence of what apparently has no



reason for being. History is little else than the tale of an uninterrupted shudder; chronicles of private life are merely accounts of combats that individuals have waged with fate; and Leconte de Lisle, who is a patient student, has noted compassionately in both the persistence of the law of evil. He should not, however, be considered a follower of Schopenhauer; the majority of his poems were published before the *Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* had crossed the Rhine; moreover, Schopenhauer did not invent pessimism; Kapila was as much occupied with pain as was that Emerson in black; indeed, it is curious to note that the first metaphysician as well as the latest of great poets are agreed that life is an affliction, and it is also curious to note that the tendency of modern thought is to an agreement with their views.

The soul, whose immortality Robespierre decreed in the law known as that of the 18th Floréal, year II.; the soul, which all antiquity, Plato included, accorded to beasts, but whose possession Christianity has limited to man; the soul, which is reported to come no one knows whence, and to depart no one knows whither, has for Leconte de Lisle a purely verbal existence. Robespierre, it is true, knew nothing about primitive man; but Leconte de Lisle does, and he knows, too, that a gorilla to which a soul is refused to-day is not a whit more elevated than was man in the sylvan age—in that age, in fact, when he had no other weapons than the branches

which he tore from a tree. And if a soul be refused to primitive man, at what epoch was the gift bestowed? Is it a result of evolution, or, as certain theologasters have asserted, is it naturally one with the body, and only separable and capable of immortality through the influence of grace divine? The last century combatted these theories with logic. Leconte de Lisle has at his disposal not alone the logic of yesterday, but the science of to-day, and to him the soul is a phantom evoked by the conscience.

"If you do not believe in a soul and in a future life," said some one to Goethe, "what do you consider to be the object of the present?" To which Goethe, with Olympian egotism, answered tersely, "Self-improvement." One may fancy that to Leconte de Lisle the object of life is none other. He was born in the Isle de Bourbon something over sixty years ago, and came to Paris when quite young. From his early home he brought little else than memories of the beauty of Nature and the invincible immensity of her forces, memories that have since served as frames and backgrounds to his verse. In Paris he followed the developments of science, and studied history, religions and life. From them he learned that man has two antagonists, himself and the exterior world; he found, too, that man is a prey to influences which mould him to their profit, and that humanity had aggravated its misfortunes by inventing explanations which it termed beliefs. Since then, in the quietest ways, he has passed

his hours in satiating that vague curiosity which besets even the most indifferent, and in convincing himself not only of the nothingness of creeds, but of the nothingness of life. Life, he says :

“ La vie est comme l’onde où tombe un corps pesant :  
Un cercle étroit s’y forme et va s’élargissant,  
Et disparaît enfin dans sa grandeur sans terme.  
La Mâyâ te séduit, mais, si ton cœur est ferme,  
Tu verras s’envoler comme un peu de vapeur  
La colère, l’amour, le désir et la peur,  
Et le Monde illusoire aux formes innombrables  
S’écroulera sous toi comme un monceau de sables.”

Gibbon, who was fond of fine paragraphs, declared all religions to be equally true to the vulgar, equally false to the philosopher, and to the statesman equally useful. But Gibbon omitted the poet; and to such an one as Leconte de Lisle no religion can be true, if for no other reason than that there is no criterion of truth; no religion can be wholly false, for every religion has enjoyed an hour of undeniable actuality; and no religion can be deemed useful if the need of it has disappeared. To his thinking, religions have served their purpose. Compounded of fables more or less absurd, and of ethics more or less wholesome, in their obscure origins they were intended to be explanations of natural phenomena with which to-day we are better acquainted. As to Christianity, it is to Leconte de Lisle an artistic creation, powerfully conceived,

venerable in its antiquity, and one whose place is now marked in the museum of history.

It has been objected, that should this view be accepted, no one would turn to the Bible for instruction, and as a consequence the gateways to immorality would be opened wide. Now Plato said that we should esteem it of the greatest importance that the fictions which children first hear should be adapted in the most perfect manner to the promotion of virtue. There are, however, not a few grave thinkers who have asserted that the Bible is inapt to serve such an end. Admittedly the morality which is displayed in the Synoptic Gospels is admirable, but it is sometimes forgotten that it is an integral part of the teaching of Socrates and the Socratics. M. Havet has shown its sweetest precepts flowing from their lips. In other portions of the Bible there are verses that exalt the spirit like wine ; there are delicacies of thought and felicities of expression that both soothe and charm ; but one must needs be a paradoxist to claim either as an aid to the promotion of virtue. Beside, as has been hinted in earlier pages, morality is more a question of temperament than of instruction. For that matter, we are most of us well aware that the instruction sometimes defeats its aim. Mr. Froude relates that when St. Patrick preached the gospel on Tarah Hill, the Druids shook their heads. The king, Leoghaire, marked their disapproval wonderingly, and asked, "Why is it that that which the cleric preaches seems so

dangerous to you?" "Because," they answered, "he preaches repentance, and the law of repentance is such that a man shall say, 'I may commit a thousand sins, and if I repent it will be not worse with me; I shall be forgiven; therefore will I continue to sin.'" Leconte de Lisle has therefore put the Bible reverently aside, and in looking back through the dreams from which it came and into the visions which it has evoked, he has murmured with the sadness of the tender-hearted:

"O songe, ô désirs vains, inutiles souhaits,  
Ceci ne sera point, maintenant ni jamais."

There is no help there, nor is there any elsewhere. The Orient is asleep in the ashes of her gods. The star of Ormuzd has burned out in the skies. On the banks of her sacred seas, Greece, hushed for evermore, rests on the divine limbs of her white immortals. In the sepulchre of the pale Nazarene, humanity guards its last divinity. Every promise is unfulfilled. There is no light save perchance in death. One torture more, one more throb of the heart, and after it nothing. The grave opens, a little flesh falls in, and the weeds of forgetfulness which soon hide the tomb grow eternally above its vanities. And still the voice of the living, of the just and of the unjust, of kings, of felons and of beasts, will be raised unsilenced, until humanity, unsatisfied as before and yet impatient for the peace which life has disturbed, is tossed at last, with its shat-

tered globe and forgotten gods, to fertilize the furrows of space where worlds ferment.

On this vista the curtain may be drawn. Neither poet nor seer can look beyond. Nature, who is unconscious in her immorality, entrancing in her beauty, savage in her cruelty, imperial in her prodigality, and appalling in her convulsions, is not only deaf, but dumb. There is no answer to any appeal. The best we can do, the best that has ever been done, is to recognise the implacability of the laws that rule the universe, and contemplate as calmly as we can the nothingness from which we are come and into which we shall all disappear. The one consolation that we hold, though it is one which may be illusory too, consists in the belief that when death comes, fear and hope are at an end. Then wonder ceases ; the insoluble no longer perplexes ; space is lost ; the infinite is blank ; the farce is done.



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